



ROSS GRANT
IN MINERS' CAMP
JOHN GARLAND

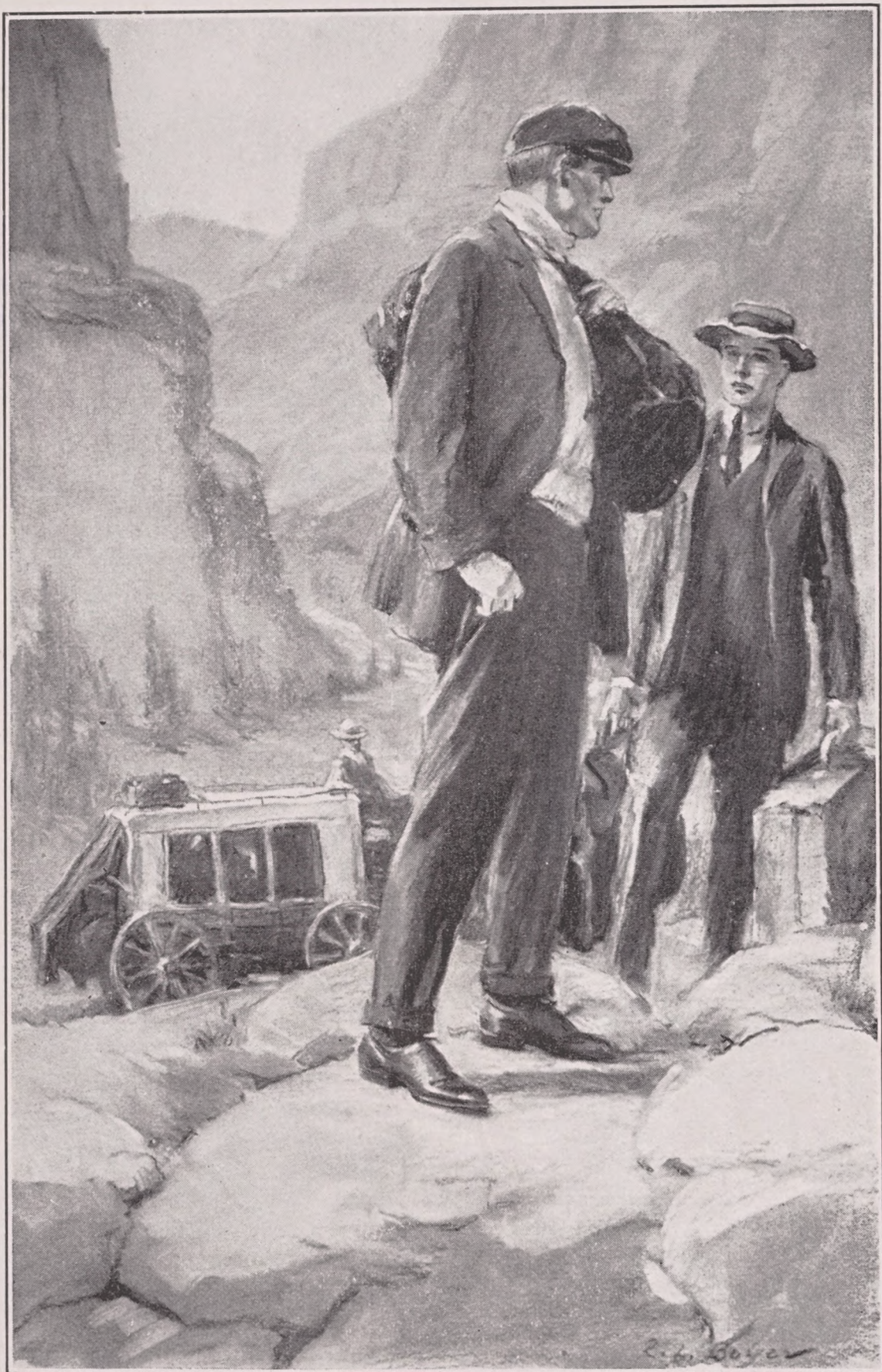


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“HOW DOES IT SEEM TO GET BACK HERE?”

ROSS GRANT IN MINERS' CAMP

BY

JOHN GARLAND

preud.

AUTHOR OF

"ROSS GRANT, TENDERFOOT"
"ROSS GRANT, GOLD HUNTER"
"ROSS GRANT ON THE TRAIL"

Illustrated by R. L. BOYER



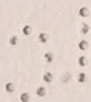
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Ross Grant in Miners' Camp

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To

Mr. and Mrs. Charles L. Tewksbury

*whose life in the Wyoming Mountains
has made "Ross Grant in Miners' Camp"
possible, I cordially dedicate this book*

Introduction

AT the end of his first year as a medical student in the University of Pennsylvania, Ross Grant accepts a call from Miners' Camp, Wyoming, to act as assistant to the mysterious camp physician. When he reaches camp he finds the owners of the mining claims on Dundee Mountain in a dispute over the boundaries of the two central claims, Seven and Eight, and the dispute threatens a clash into which circumstances force the newcomer. This, the final book in the series, deals with this clash, and the part played in it by the owners of the two claims, "Dad Page" and "Kansas" Brown, and deals also with the mysterious camp physician.

In the first book, "Ross Grant, Tenderfoot," we meet Ross when he first arrives in Wyoming and earns his title, "Doc Tenderfoot."

In the second book, "Ross Grant, Gold Hunter," we find him searching for a cache of free gold in order to rescue it from robbers who are trying to keep it from the rightful owner.

INTRODUCTION

In the third book, "Ross Grant on the Trail," he engages in an exciting chase after a man who, by means of a "salted" gold mine, seeks to defraud Lucky Frace, who is a friend of Ross.

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Ross Grant in Miners’ Camp



Ross Grant in Miners' Camp

CHAPTER I

A CALL FROM WYOMING

ROSS GRANT, freshman "medic" in the University of Pennsylvania, stuffed his scrawled notes on osteology into his pocket and faced a sharp April wind. He buttoned his coat across a broad chest, turned the collar up to meet his closely cropped dark hair, pulled his cap forward until it pushed his outstanding ears into yet more prominent relief, thrust his reddened hands into his coat pockets, and sprinted for the dormitory where he roomed. Running up the steps he burst into his room and fell with avidity on a heap of mail left, but a moment before, by the postman.

The top envelope was postmarked "New York City" and was directed to Ross Grant, Jr.

"Me!" said Ross aloud. He puffed out his lean smooth cheeks and nodded with satisfaction. "From father." He held the envelope up against the light, noted its single sheet and grinned.

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"Poor correspondents the Grants are, all of us," he thought, opening the letter.

"My dear son," it began, with an absence of circumlocution also characteristic of the Grants. "Two months ago I bought half of a promising mining claim of Dad Page ——"

"The dickens you did!" exclaimed the son aloud. "I didn't know it."

He read on: "It is Claim Seven on Dundee in Miners' Camp, and is being worked by Page now. I've received word in an indirect way that there's trouble between Seven and Eight over the boundaries. What do you know about the matter?"

"Nothing," said Ross positively. "Absolutely nothing. I haven't heard from Wyoming since I left there in September."

Then he read the last paragraph of the letter. "I hope you are well both mentally and physically ——"

"*'Mentally'!*" ejaculated Ross. "What under the canopy ——"

He turned the sheet and saw the explanation. "How much will you need for spring clothing? I have asked this question twice before."

Ross chuckled. "Isn't that just like father?" he thought. "He never gives side-binders. He just brings things home to a fellow in a reminder that sticks straight in like a needle. 'Mentally

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well'! Huh! He won't have to ask me a fourth time."

Nodding emphatically, he read on, the chuckle dying in his throat.

"And while I am on this subject," the elder Grant wrote, "I want to say further to you that while I am not in a position to know what you are adding to yourself mentally this year I can see what you are losing, and losing more rapidly than you realize. I shall leave you to draw your own conclusions."

"Whew!" breathed Ross aloud, his face flushing, "that doesn't miss being a side-binder by more than a mile!"

He could draw his own conclusions easily enough. He was getting forgetful and careless in what appeared to him little matters. Aunt Anne, who had mothered him since he was twelve, had labored with him patiently by letter during the year, but he was so accustomed to her reminders that they made no permanent impression. But his father's reminders were another matter. His father was a successful business man in New York, and was regarded by his son with a large degree of affection and pride and awe. The two were, unfortunately, not very intimate friends, owing to the fact that the boy had spent the formative period of his boyhood with his uncle, Dr. Grant,

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and Aunt Anne, visiting his father and step-mother infrequently. These visits had been a source of misery to Ross so long as the awe and pride were greater than the affection. He had felt keenly that he was a disappointment to his father because of the profession he had chosen and the feeling had added to his natural shyness and awkwardness. But the two had grown nearer to each other during the past year, the elder Grant having arrived at the conclusion that his son was worth while even though he preferred to study medicine instead of entering the office of Ross Grant Senior. Then it was that Ross's affection had outrun both pride and awe and he could not bear to think of doing anything to lessen his father's newly acquired pride in him.

He went slowly to the window and made a memorandum on the back of the envelope containing his father's first "side-binder."

X sweater
X suit
X overcoat
X shoes
X hat

Then he slipped the letter into his pocket and disappearing into the bath room proceeded to rid his hands of an accumulation of ink from his fountain pen.

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"Hello—in the bath room there!" came a voice from across the hall.

Ross set the door ajar and helloed back again while plying the soap industriously on the stains.

"Now, Grant!" the voice continued, "don't say you haven't time to-night, because to-morrow's Saturday."

"Well," non-committally.

"Say now," the voice reasoned, "be a sport for once this year. We're going out to Germantown for supper at seven, and you're going too!"

"Am I? Don't be so sure. What do you get?"

"Lobster salad plus."

"And what does it cost?"

"Two."

There was a sound of splashing water, then a muffled voice: "I'd like to acquire a supply of lobster salad, all right, but I can't see myself pried loose from two dollars for it!"

"Shucks!" called the student across the hall. "Get a little fun out of life."

"I do—without a headache the next morning," defensively.

A brief silence across the hall answered this and then the voice uprose again ignoring the thrust.

"We want you to spin us your Western yarns. There'll be a mess of seniors there to hear——Loosen up, Cost Grant, for once!"

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"Nope," said "Cost" Grant with finality. "The two dollars would be gone, and so would the taste of the salad, in about two minutes, and I can spin all my Western experiences right here in this house."

"Huh!" scoffed the voice. "I bet if I had a father in Wall Street I'd go through college eating lobster salad every day instead of making one dollar do the work of five!"

"If you had my father," retorted Ross swiftly, "you'd either do as he wished you to or you'd do as I'm doing!"

"Queer father!" The voice across the hall was a mere mutter now, but Ross heard and answered hotly, the more hotly because he agreed privately with the mutter.

"He gives me my choice, all right, without any kick coming from him."

"Your choice and your clothes!" the voice interrupted half humorously, half indignantly.

"The clothes are no small item of expense, and the choice is everything!" still hotly. "If I should go into his office as he wishes me to I could have plenty of lobster suppers—and other things. But as long as I insist on becoming a surgeon I've got to make myself one without much help from him. I've taken my own course, and there's no kick coming from me either."

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"Well, Cost," the voice was resigned, "go your own way. I never saw a fellow so determined to saw folks up. I hope they'll enjoy it as much as you will."

Ross laughed as he departed for the library, but the laugh was forced. Loyalty to his father forbade him from allowing any criticism to go unanswered, but he could not—yet—see the wisdom which Ross Grant Senior was exercising in allowing his son to make his own way through college. Ross Grant Junior would have cheerfully absorbed the lobster salad suppers that "Cost" Grant could not afford. There were other points of wisdom in the elder Grant's treatment of his son. In return for services rendered him in Wyoming the father had paid the son not in money, but in a share in a gold mining "claim," telling him to do with it as he saw fit. This ownership had forced Ross's attention into business channels, and after due consideration he had disposed of his share for a thousand dollars, reserving a royalty on any metals mined on the claim.

He explained the reason for this sale to his father in the autumn just before entering the University.

"You see," he began, "I had expected to work my way through college from the first. But I'm entering not prepared very well and the first year's going to be a corker of a grind. So I'm

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not going to hunt up a job until my sophomore year, and I had to have that thousand."

"Then," asked the older Grant gravely, "you expect to make the thousand stretch over your first year, do you?"

Ross produced a sheet of items and handed it to his father. "I've figured on six hundred for the first year, and then added a hundred for unforeseen expenses. They're always cropping up, you know, where you least expect 'em!"

Then it was that the elder man, glancing down the list of items, found himself saying something he had not intended to say:

"See here, Ross, you may look to me for all clothing of any sort during your course."

And when the boy, surprised and grateful, burst into a spontaneous "Thank you, sir, I wasn't looking for that!" Ross Senior had hard work to stick to his resolution and keep his hands off his check book.

Ross Junior, however, was not now connecting such a state of mind with his father as he approached the library. He was merely considering the feasibility of adding half a dozen shirts and two neckties to the list on the back of the envelope, when he was hailed from the library entrance by a group of students corralling in their midst a man of dignity, advanced years and gray hair.

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Half a dozen voices introduced Ross: "Here's the chap we told you about, Mr. Scudder"—"This is Ross Grant"—"Late of the Wild and Woolly West"—"He'll yarn it about Miners' Camp for you"—"He's our only exhibit from Wyoming!"—"Go to it, Cost."

Yet other voices were simultaneously telling Ross that Mr. Scudder was an alumnus of the University of Pennsylvania, college, and that he had an alumnus brother—a medic. Then they allowed the gray-haired man to speak.

"Grant," he began shaking hands cordially, "these fellows tell me that you spent a year out in the Wyoming Shoshones, around Miners' Camp?"

"Yes, sir, I did. Last year it was."

Mr. Scudder fixed keen gray eyes on the young man. "Did you? Isn't that strange?" musingly. "I never dreamed of meeting here——" He changed abruptly into brisk questioning, "What sort of a place is Miners' Camp?"

Ross hesitated, because the question called for more time in answering than he had at command. "It's a dozen log shacks and two boarding houses and some bunk houses scattered along Wood River up in a cañon two miles above sea level. There's an eighty mile stage ride to get into it, and you can neither get in nor out, sometimes, especially at this time of year."

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"Why not?"

"Snow's too deep."

"What! Now? in April?" incredulously.

"Yes, now," Ross declared. "It snows every month in the year, but now all of our April showers are falling there in the shape of ten-foot-deep snow-storms. The stage trail gets blocked sometimes so it takes the whole camp days to dig it out."

"Eighty miles from a railroad!" repeated the stranger musingly. "How do they get supplies into camp?"

"'Packed' up by stage or freighter outfit."

"M-m, yes. Stores up there?"

Ross regarded his questioner curiously as he answered. "Why, a sort of a store. Belongs to one of the companies." To himself he added, "What under the sun is he agent for?"

"Any church?" asked Mr. Scudder.

"No."

"School?"

Ross grinned. "No, there are no children to go to school—no women there—just men."

"Saloon?"

"No saloon."

His questioner looked incredulous, repeating, "No saloon? Boys must have a dry time."

Ross hesitated. "Of course, I'm not saying

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there's no drinking in Miners' Camp. I know the stuff goes in there to individuals. The mining companies can't help that. But it's against Wyoming law for a saloon to be established within so many miles of a mining camp—I've forgotten the number, and it's to the interest of the companies to see to it that the law is carried out, too, with the men all handling explosives."

"Uh-huh," nodded his questioner. Then he changed the subject abruptly. "How long since the mining companies have employed a doctor?"

Ross looked his surprise. "A doctor? They don't employ one ——"

"Yes, they do," contradicted Mr. Scudder. "I know, because he's my brother. He's there now."

"Really!" cried Ross. "Something new, then. Last year there was no doctor—that is, no regular physician—nearer than Cody, eighty miles away."

Mr. Scudder nodded and smiled. "Well, there is now. I think my brother's attention was first called to the place by an investment he made. He bought some shares in a promising mining claim somewhere around there—don't know where, but I remember it's being worked by a man they call 'Kansas Brown.'"

Ross laughed. "Let the West alone for nicknames. No one keeps his own. But see here!" he pulled out his watch and glanced at it hur-

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riedly. "I'm sorry, but I've got to hustle to a lecture—Gaynor on Osteology," he added explanatorily.

"Dr. Gaynor!" repeated Mr. Scudder with lifted eyebrows. "He's the man who took my brother's place ten years ago—a classmate he is, too."

"Your brother's place!" echoed Ross. "Was your brother a lecturer here once?"

Mr. Scudder nodded in evident pride. "For two years, yes."

Ross backed away from the group thoughtfully. "Lecturer in the University of Pennsylvania ten years ago, and now company doctor in Miners' Camp." He whistled a low note as he hurried down the street. "Well, that beats me! Some change that!"

When he entered the lecture room, Dr. Gaynor, the surgeon lecturer, was standing behind his desk talking in an undertone with one of the instructors. As Ross passed the desk he heard the instructor say, "He's in ten ——" the rest of the sentence escaping his ears. Thinking nothing of the words he sought his allotted chair and on the broad arm opened his note-book, uncapped his pen and held himself in readiness to absorb the lecture.

The lecturer was a squarely built man in middle life. The predominating impression he gave Ross was strength. The boy knew in a vague sort

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of way that he was of medium height, neatly dressed, slightly bald, gray and smooth faced. But through this assortment of nameable characteristics leaped the indefinable one of inner strength and a self-confidence that was far from conceit.

When the instructor had left the room Dr. Gaylor picked up his notes and fingered them absently, running his glance over the incoming students. To him they were known only as the occupants of chairs with numbers. Ross's chair was numbered 10, and it was to 10 that the surgeon's eyes returned thoughtfully when the last chair was filled. Ross, however, intent on the notes of the last lecture, did not notice the scrutiny, unusual in itself because of the extreme impersonal relations existing between the "chiefs" in the medical college and the students. This was in conformity to an unwritten rule enforced by the students themselves, which made impartiality absolute.

At the end of the hour and the lecture, Ross hurried from the room and going down the stairs two at a jump, was starting across the campus at the same rapid pace toward his room when a sudden recollection halted him. He did not intend to reach the dormitory before the fellows left for Germantown and the lobster supper. He had not

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the price of the supper in his pocket, and he was unwilling to be "joshed" about it further. Therefore he wandered past the house down to the corner bookstore in front of which a boy with red ears and nose presided over a news stand. Ross bought the first paper his hand lighted on, the *Chicago News*, and standing with his back to the wind and his shoulders hunched up, glanced idly over the pages until a paragraph down in one corner of the last page caught his eye.

"This beats me!" he exclaimed. "I've caught Wyoming coming and going to-day and here it is again!"

"Heh?" said the newsboy, kicking his shoes on the end of the stand to keep his feet warm. "Wot's that?"

Ross read the paragraph again: "It's Miners' Camp. Place I know about! I'll cut this out and send it to father."

It was a brief and sensational paragraph to the effect that six-shooters, which were supposed to have gone out of fashion in Wyoming, were again in evidence on the owners of mining claims located on Dundee Mountain in the Shoshones. "Owing to some carelessness in the surveys of the mountain," the paragraph stated, "claim owners are finding themselves in a serious 'line fence' mix-up. The storm center is at present on claims Seven

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and Eight, worked by 'Dad' Page and 'Kansas' Brown."

With the paper stuffed into his pocket, Ross presently mounted to his room in the solitude he desired, and sat down to answer his father's queries. "This is the list of the things I need this spring," he wrote. "I'm sorry I forgot to answer the question before."

Here he paused, gnawed the end of his pen a moment and then with his mouth a straight and determined line, he added defensively, "I may be forgetful about clothes and other things like that, but I never forget anything that concerns my work."

As he dropped a period he reread the sentence and his lips relaxed a bit. He read it again and frowned. At the third reading he reached for an ink eraser. "That sounds—bombastic," he said aloud and industriously rubbed over the blatant sentence without, however, succeeding in erasing it. "I know what father would say—he'd say that anything I had to do was my business as long as I was doing it."

Over the bombastic sentence he wrote, in more humble terms, "I know I'm getting forgetful about things on the side, but I try not to be heedless when it comes to my work."

In answering the question about Dundee Seven,

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Ross added the perfunctory information, "The paragraph I'm enclosing will help explain matters, perhaps. I found it in a Chicago paper to-day."

Stuffing this into an envelope he directed it hurriedly and running down-stairs sought the mail box on the corner and dropped the letter in with a thud.

"There!" he thought, sprinting for the dormitory. "That's off my conscience." At the door of the house he paused shivering. "I wonder now if I sealed that envelope." He mounted the stairs slowly. "Did I, or didn't I? I vum! I don't know. I hope father won't get hold of it first if I didn't. I guess the mail goes through his stenographer's hands first always. I hope it does!"

As soon as he reached his room, however, all thought of a possibly unsealed letter, spring clothing and Dundee Seven passed out of the young student's mind. The erased sentence told the truth. The moment Ross turned to any subject bearing on his work his heedlessness became thoughtfulness and every faculty stood at attention. Donning his green eye-shade he pushed a mess of books, papers, neckties and collars away from the foreground of his study table and opened a well-thumbed book on the Central Nervous Sys-

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tem, humped himself over it comfortably, elbows on the table, his head supported on his hands. The dormitory was unusually quiet, the noise centers having moved temporarily to a certain restaurant in Germantown.

It was not difficult for the embryo surgeon to lose himself in the intricacies of the general Central Nervous System so completely that his own special one caused him to jump when a single loud thump on the door was immediately followed by a voice :

“ Are you here, Grant, or in Germantown ? ”

“ Here,” yelled Ross.

The inquirer came in asking further : “ What’s the matter with Germantown ? ”

“ Town’s all right,” retorted Ross, “ but not the price.”

Lambert, an intern in the University Hospital, threw himself down on the bed, sprawling his legs over the side with a due regard to the semi-cleanliness of the spread. He removed his eye-glasses and laid them on a stand at the head of the bed, propped his shoulders up on both pillows and regarded Ross lazily.

“ Cost ! ” he philosophized. “ Always ‘ cost ’ with you and me. Dollars ! The dickens ! I could make use of a lot more myself.” He burrowed deeper into the pillows. “ If you don’t

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want to come to spectacles, son," he advised with a lazy wave of the hand, "turn your back to that light, hold up your book and ——"

A loud exclamation from Ross cut the advice in two. He had reached for his notes on the Central Nervous System and his hand had fallen on the clipping from the *Chicago News*—the paragraph that he had informed his father was contained in the letter which had just left his hands.

"Now father will have another on me!" he exclaimed. He jerked the green shade off and stared ruefully at Lambert, fingering the offending slip of paper.

"What's the racket?" asked Lambert.

Ross explained.

"Getting careless, eh, in your old age!" commented Lambert. "We don't have a department here to teach a cure for that, do we? Great oversight on the part of the medical fathers! It seems to be up to each fellow to cure himself without the application of ——"

"Oh, father can provide enough applications!" interrupted Ross, "and if any are lacking, my uncle—the doctor uncle that brought me up, you know, can furnish a supply. And Aunt Anne comes in strong on any lack from the other two!"

"And still you forget!" ejaculated Lambert. "Exactly proves what I've previously and afore-

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time mentioned—namely and to wit, that it's up to each of us to cure himself."

"But when you're simply eaten up with your work!" Ross began impatiently, "other things get by and you can't help yourself. A fellow can't remember everything."

"Well, in this case there are no bones broken, are there?" the other inquired. "A two cent stamp will repair all damages."

"That's just the trouble," returned Ross quickly. "A two cent stamp will merely prove to father that I've been forgetful again, and he has no patience with forgetfulness."

"Cut it out then!" advised Lambert. "Amputate it." He chuckled in approval of his surgical pun and stared drowsily at the nickel clock ticking loudly on a shelf above the table.

"If that clock isn't an hour fast it ought to be!"

Ross adjusted his eye-shade again, answering absently: "It's exactly right, that clock is. Got to go back to the hospital this evening?"

"Yep—in half an hour."

Ross enclosed the newspaper cutting in an envelope, carefully sealed it, directed it to his father and dropped it in Lambert's hat. "There!" he exclaimed forcefully. "Now if you fail to mail that something will fall on you the next time we meet, and it won't be anything light either!"

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Lambert's only reply was made through his nose :
“ Yeh—I'd like to lie here and sleep for a week.”

Ross turned to his notes and began deciphering his written remarks on the Nervous System while his guest muttered, still through his nose :

“ M-m—there's something I've been going to say to you for days. M-m, when I see you it ain't there and when it's there I don't see you—so ——”

A muffled snore finished the statement, followed by others until the nickel clock warned Ross that the sleeper's time was up.

“ Hi, Lambert !” he called. “ Come out of that !”

“ Huh? What? Where am I?” The half awakened intern sat up bewildered, dropping his feet heavily to the floor.

“ You're right here now, but you're due at the hospital in ten minutes,” explained Ross. “ Better get a gait on.”

The intern rubbed his eyes open and threw up his arms in a prodigious and noisy yawn. Then, suddenly, he dropped them, exclaiming :

“ Now I know what it is I wanted to say—there's an old chap over in the ward, a charity patient, that would throw a fit if he could see you, because you've tasted the air and water of Wyoming.”

“ Is he from Wyoming?” asked Ross, at once interested.

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"Yes, and every other state in the West, if you believe him. Better go see him some afternoon."

"All right. I'll go the first minute I get time."

"Do it." The intern arose reluctantly. "You'll find a long-lost brother. When he's himself he's quiet, but when he's a degree off in his head the flood-gates are up and the words come in torrents. He saw something in a newspaper to-day that got him going—some Chicago paper it was—about Wyoming."

"Did he see that?" cried Ross. "Must be the same thing I saw. It's in this envelope now. Bet you I will go see him—sure!"

"He'd fall on your neck if he were able to get up," interrupted the intern, "but as it is he'll probably expect you to fall on his. Ask for 'Razorback' Jones if you want him to love you all the days of your life. That's his pet name, it seems, in the West!"

Ross laughed. "Long and bony, is he?"

Young Dr. Lambert drifted toward the door. "Yes. At his best you might have called him bony merely, but now, at his worst, he's all bone."

After the intern left, Ross, grinning, wrote, "Razorback Jones" on his calendar pad. "Monday I'll go," he decided, and Monday he did go—but not at the right time. He had forgotten that the intern said "afternoon" and presented him-

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self in the office of the hospital in the morning between two lectures when he had a free hour. The stenographer occupied the office alone and to her Ross preferred his request for a call on Razor-back Jones.

"From two to five are calling hours," smiled the stenographer.

"Oh—yes!" muttered Ross. "I remember now—Lambert did say afternoon."

The girl's laughing voice followed him as he retreated to the door. "Are you one of Razor-back's friends?"

Ross shook his head. "I want to be, that's all. I've never seen him."

"You'll want to be more than ever when you do see him," laughed the girl. "We all are interested in his stories—and he sure tells enough of 'em. I don't know when to believe 'em and when not. Just now he wants to see some one from Wyoming."

"I'm a good one for him to see, then!" exclaimed Ross.

The girl looked at him with increased interest. "Are you a Wyomingite?"

"No, not in the first place. But I was there all last year, up in the mining region."

"Then you ought to come and see him, sure!" declared the stenographer enthusiastically. "He

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wants some one to write a letter for him. A lot of us have offered to do it, but no! It must be written by some one who understands gold mining—quartz mining. He's kept that going for twenty-four hours—'Some one must write who'll understand' and it seems no one can understand except some one from some gold mining place."

"Wonder what he has on his mind," mused Ross. "I'll come. Let's see. I haven't time this afternoon, but to-morrow I guess I can get in a call."

But, before he found time for the promised call, something occurred of so unusual a nature that the Westerner was driven completely out of his mind. The unusual was nothing less than a summons to call on Dr. Gaynor at his office in the city. It came the following morning by way of a note from his secretary and contained no explanation of the object of the astonishing summons. What was the matter? Had he done something flagrantly wrong? He knew he had not. Even if he had, Dr. Gaynor would have known nothing about it. It was not the surgeon's business to correct nor even encourage students, but to give of his knowledge and experience to a lot of numbered and occupied chairs. Furthermore, on account of the rough zeal with which the students upheld the unwritten rule which forbade any per-

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sonal connection between the "chiefs" and the students, Ross was alarmed over Dr. Gaynor's discovery that chair 10 held him. He swallowed his heart repeatedly between the arrival of the note and three o'clock in the afternoon, the time set for the interview, being careful to mention the matter to no one, not even Lambert. In the surgeon's outer office he scanned the waiting patients anxiously to discover any possible connection with the University by which news of his being there might be taken back to the upholders of that unwritten rule. The patients were all strangers, however, indifferent strangers, and the boy was not allowed to linger among them long but was promptly summoned to the surgeon's private office.

He found Dr. Gaynor seated before his table, hunting for something in one of the drawers. Still swallowing apprehensively, Ross sat down on the edge of the chair on the opposite side of the table and waited. He looked strangely out of place in the patient's chair with his big muscles and a tanned face from which glowed a health that only clean living and activity can give.

"Well, Grant," asked the surgeon absently without looking up, "how are you making it in college?"

Ross got nearer the edge of his chair. He cleared his throat and answered honestly, "Pretty

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well for me ; but that wouldn't mean much for some of the other fellows."

Dr. Gaynor paused in his search to look at the boy. "How's that?" he asked.

"I mean," explained Ross, "that I have to plug away harder than a lot of the fellows do—I don't get things through my head so easily."

"And you realize you don't?" asked the doctor quickly.

"Why, yes, of course! Can't help but realize it," declared Ross wonderingly.

The doctor leaned back in his swivel chair, a letter in his hand. He regarded Ross with keen interest. "What are you going to do about it—give up?"

"Give up!" repeated Ross. "Give up!" His eyes narrowed and his chin shot out after the manner of the Grant family. "I guess not. Why—I'm going to make a surgeon—and a good one, too!"

The doctor nodded. "It's not always the man who stands at the head of his classes in college who stands at the head of his profession afterward."

"No, but I'd like to stand at the head in college just long enough to see how I'll feel in after life!" returned Ross quickly.

Dr. Gaynor laughed, then abruptly changed the subject.

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"It's not often," he began, "that a chap of your build occupies that chair. Where did you get those muscles?"

Ross grinned, regarding his hands and wrists rather sheepishly. "At the business end of a pickaxe and shovel out in Wyoming."

The doctor nodded. The information did not seem to surprise him. "I'm going out there myself this summer. Going to take a month off. How came you to go?"

"Father sent me," Ross explained. "He used to knock about among the mountains when he was a young man. He was 'quartz crazy' for a while, and invested in some gold mining claims in the Shoshones—he sent me out to help work one."

"Uh-huh," assented Dr. Gaynor. "So you worked all day—and nights, evenings?"

Ross looked puzzled. "Nights," he repeated. "Nights I was so tired and sleepy sometimes I couldn't remember getting into my bunk when I'd find myself there in the morning. Sleep! and eat!" Ross drew a long breath. Words failed him. "Well, I should say so!" he ended.

The doctor nodded and, opening the letter, glanced down the first page. "Now as to what I wanted to see you about to-day—I'm looking for a student mentioned in this letter, a freshman med-

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ical called, in Wyoming, 'Doc Tenderfoot.' Know anything about him?"

"What?" Ross almost shouted in his astonishment. "Doc Tenderfoot! But then," restraining himself, "there may be a dozen by that name."

Dr. Gaynor looked up smiling quizzically. "What do you know about that name?"

Ross countered with a question, "Where's the letter from?"

"Wyoming—Miners' Camp, Big Horn County." The doctor read the directions from the letter.

Ross drew a long breath. "Now, if that isn't the queerest!"

"What is?" asked the doctor, still smiling.

Ross smoothed his cap. "Why—I was called that out there last year."

For a long moment Dr. Gaynor said nothing. He tipped his chair back and fitted the ends of his fingers together while he stared into vacancy and ceased to smile. Then he said slowly with thoughtful pauses between statements: "This letter is from an old classmate of mine—Dr. Scudder. He went out to Miners' Camp last winter. There's no nurse to be had there, of course, and he ——"

Here the speaker stopped and alternately studied the rug and Ross. Then he made an abrupt half-remark, "Grant, Dr. Scudder is a ——"

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He paused again, fitted his finger-tips together with care and began on another tack: "Scudder writes that he wants an assistant this summer. And because of what he has heard about you—about 'Doc Tenderfoot,' he wants me to hunt him up and send him out there."

"Me?" cried Ross.

Dr. Gaynor opened his hands and threw them out in a peculiar gesture. "Yes, the job is yours if you want it—and I hope, Grant, that you'll take it."

CHAPTER II

LOCKED DOORS

ONE sunny morning in June Ross Grant dragged two battered suit cases out of his clothes-press and planted them, open, in the middle of the floor. He took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, turned the key in the door to insure the privacy necessary to strenuous packing and began work. Presently the door rattled. The rattle brought no response from the worker.

"Letter here, Grant," a voice called, "under the door."

Ross fell on it eagerly as it was pushed under. He recognized the careless direction, the postage stamp stuck on the envelope awry. He had received only two such missives during the year. Picking up a knife he slit the envelope hastily, saying disappointedly:

"It's from Omaha. I was hoping Nick was in the mountains already."

Then he read:

"DEAR DOC:

"Yours rec'd. Glad you're going to be in camp this summer. So am I, but not yet. I am

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going to Saint Louis with one of the fellows for a couple of weeks after school closes, and that won't be till the 20th. So I can't reach Miners' before the middle of July. Then we will do more talking than either of us can do on paper. Did you know that Dad is in an awful row over Seven and Eight? If you don't you'll find out quick enough when you reach camp. Can't bear to have a row going on and not be in it from the start, but guess there'll be some of it left when I get there. And did you know that Lucky Frace is in 'Frisco getting together enough men with money to form a mining company to work the Elk Hoof mine? He expects to get at work in September. We may miss seeing him, as I have to come back to school September 1st this year.

"Well, so long till the middle of July. Longest letter I ever wrote.

"NICHOLAS PAGE."

Ross laughed. "Just like 'The Monkey'! Wonder if he still wants to join the Wild West Show."

Nicholas Page, Dad Page's adopted son, nicknamed "The Monkey" on account of his agility, was three years younger than Ross, but the boys had been together much the summer before and were warm friends.

Ross was stuffing the letter back into its envelope when there sounded a heavy footstep in the hall, and the door-knob turned without results, to

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the evident surprise of the turner. Then Lambert's voice uprose in injured tones.

"Hang it all, Grant, have I come all this way to see a woolly Westerner ——"

The door opened suddenly, too suddenly for Lambert, who was pushing against it. He catapulted into the room, over the suit cases, and brought up on his favorite resting place—the bed. Here he spread himself out restfully, asking :

"Why the locked door?"

"To keep out the rabble," replied Ross, wiping the perspiration from his face. "I've got only an hour now to get things jammed into these bags. Then I'm off for a place where locks on doors are unheard of."

"I wish," declared Lambert with energy, "that I were going with you. Say! Land me a job out there. Must be a good place to get in a little practice." Then, without awaiting a reply, "Gee whiz! If this room doesn't look as though a Western cyclone had struck it!"

Ross, in front of the study table, was sorting papers in frenzied haste and filling the waste-basket with refuse. He tumbled his letters over and picking up an envelope a trifle fatter than the rest, opened it, hesitated, and instead of dropping it into the waste-basket, shied it at a suit case. It

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fell short of its aim and Lambert dragged himself off the bed and rescued it.

"A typed direction," he remarked lazily. "She can pound a typewriter, can't she?"

"Huh!" exclaimed Ross. "Read it and you'll find the writer is a 'he,' and that he can dictate a letter straight to the point, several points in fact!"

Lambert sat back on his heels and opened the sheets. "Your father, eh?" He read down the first page, looked thoughtful and proceeded to the second, muttering, "I guess he's right as well as 'right to the point.'"

"It just happens," explained Ross apologetically, "that father has run across half my forgetfulness this year—I seem possessed to be headless where he is concerned. Maybe that's because I'd rather have any one else find my faults out. But I've forgotten to answer his questions, and forgotten to put in a newspaper paragraph that I wrote was being enclosed, and I forgot to write to Miners' Camp to the superintendent of the Gales Ridge mine when he asked me to—so now," ruefully, "I'm catching it, as you see."

The young intern rocked slowly back and forth on his feet. "There's one thing here that he says," thoughtfully, "that I presume is dead right."

"What's that?"

Lambert opened the letter again and read:

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“ ‘ You tell me you are never careless or forgetful about your work. That may be true now. But will it be true five years from now ? Carelessness is a progressive habit. It has a hold on you outside your profession, but I have not the slightest belief that it will *stay outside* long, being, as I have said, a progressive habit. Competition is too keen these days along every line, and the price of success is too high for you to plant any obstacles in your path, and especially obstacles with such tenacious roots and bushy tops as carelessness and forgetfulness. Cut them out.’ ”

Lambert folded up the sheets and returned them to the envelope. “ Several points there, as you say,” he remarked thoughtfully, “ and it would be well if they stuck into a few others I know as well as you ! ”

Thoughtfully he put the letter in the suit case, muttering that it would stand more than one reading.

Ross, who was holding in his hand a small and thin book, hesitated and then grinning sheepishly, tossed it to Lambert. “ As long as you have read that letter and agreed with it you might as well see what father had asked me to do.”

Lambert opened the book and looked it over with puzzled eye while the other explained :

“ Father followed after that letter. He sent me

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a telegram to meet him at the Broad Street station. He stayed between two trains, and if you think that letter is a broadside you ought to have heard him fill in that half hour!" Ross squirmed uncomfortably at the recollection.

"After he had let off steam about me he told me about himself. He told me that when he was my age he was the most forgetful chap you ever saw. Said he could remember that his own head sat on his shoulders and that was about all. Said he was fired from job after job because of his carelessness, until he woke up and decided to quit. And," concluded Ross abruptly, pointing to the book, "that's the plan he invented to cure himself, and now he has passed it on to me."

"What under the sun ——" Lambert was beginning when Ross interrupted:

"It's a tabulated journal of Carelessness. I'm to keep it down to the letter and submit it to father the 15th of each month."

The intern examined it with interest and amusement. It was arranged in the form of a journal for the month of June 15th and ending July 15th, two pages being devoted to each day. Under each date were four headings typewritten.

"'I. THINGS I HAVE FORGOTTEN TO DO,'" Lambert read aloud under JUNE 1. Half-way down the page he read, "'II. IMMEDIATE RESULTS OF

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I.'” At the head of the second page he saw, “‘III. WHAT I HAVE DONE TO REMEDY I.’” Half-way down that page appeared the last heading, “‘IV. RESULTS OF III.’”

Lambert looked up grinning. “Say! If this ain’t a great scheme I never saw one. The general idea, of course, is to break you of the habit of forgetting——”

“By making it more trouble to write down all that stuff than to remember in the first place,” Ross finished the sentence quickly.

“Yes,” added Lambert more slowly, “and by making you trace out step by step the actual results of your carelessness. Say!” with an access of enthusiasm, “your father has a head on him, all right!”

“My father,” returned Ross proudly, “is a self-made man. He has a head, and it has got him somewhere. He used it, and I expect it bothers him to see me wasting any of the little brains I have inherited from him! I expect he carries more details in one cell of gray matter than I do in my whole head, and yet he finds time outside of a big business to remember and fix up for me a scheme that he declares made his memory what it is.”

Ross’s voice was rueful as well as proud. His pride in his father did not quite overcome his

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natural distaste for that unique journal, the work it entailed and the confession of shortcomings it would bear to his father.

"And you expect to do the thing, do you?"

Ross looked in surprise at the questioner. "Of course I expect to," he returned in a wondering voice. "Father asked me to."

Lambert bit his lip. "Yes—I see. Well, have you begun?"

"Just turn over three leaves there and you'll find out."

Lambert turned the leaves. Under June 17th he read: "'I. Forgot to return library book and kept it over time five days. II. Cost me five cents. III. Returned book with cash. IV. Satisfied the librarian. Walked two miles to save the five cents in car fare.'"

Lambert burst out laughing and slapped his knee. "Will your father take time to read this sort of thing?"

"You bet he will! He won't miss an entry. But so far, you see, there are only two and they don't amount to anything!"

"I see," turning the leaves, "and your hope is that there won't be more! The 15th of July then, as I understand it, you ship this book back to your father and your father sends you a July and August record, eh?"

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"That's the idea—yes."

Lambert rose and held out his hand. "So long, Grant. Success go with you. I hope you find Scudder a jolly and agreeable M. D. If there are any vacancies out there, book yours truly for one!"

As he opened the door he paused to inquire: "Going to Wyoming straight from here, are you?"

"No," rejoined Ross; "I'm going to Uncle Fred's for a few days. He's a doctor in the mountains above Wilkes Barre. I've lived there since I was a kid, with him and Aunt Anne. Oh, I wouldn't think of going away without getting in a sight of them before I go. It was uncle that started me toward surgery. Father wanted awfully to have me in business with him, but he didn't catch me young enough!"

After Lambert had gone, Ross redoubled his activities, sitting on his suit cases and jouncing up and down until the hasps could be worked. Then jamming his hat on and clamping his umbrella under one arm he picked up his baggage and was starting for the door when one of the suit cases hit the waste-paper basket and caused it to disgorge its contents on the floor. He dropped his baggage and was gathering up the papers when he came across a discarded portion of his cal-

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endar pad and the scrawled name of "Razorback Jones."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he cried aloud. "From that day to this I've never thought of Razorback—and the letter he wanted written by some one who knew gold mining—well——"

He did not finish his sentence, but the Book of Forgetfulness weighed heavily in his breast pocket. Still, omitting to call on Razorback had no results, could have none, nor could he do anything to remedy No. 1.

He caught up his suit cases again and hurried out to his eating house with twenty minutes to spare before train time.

Two weeks later, having annexed to his limited baggage a little old hide-covered "emergency chest" which had made the trip to Wyoming before, he reached Cody at the terminal of the Burlington branch line into Wyoming and boarded the stage for an all night ride across the "bad lands" to Meeteetse. The only other passenger in the stage was a man somewhat under thirty, muscular and sunburned, who climbed in beside Ross, bundled in a heavy overcoat. He was evidently a stranger to the driver and not communicative to his seat mate. As soon as the stage started he slumped down in his corner, drew a soft cap over his eyes and went to sleep. At the half-way stage

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camp where the driver fed his four horses, himself and his passengers at midnight, the stranger did not get out of the stage, but settled himself back more comfortably and slept on.

When the stage reached Meeteetse, the little ranch center on the Gray Bull, the taciturn passenger woke up, lifted his chin from the collar of his top coat, pushed back his cap, and for the first time Ross saw his face distinctly. It was a lean face, smooth shaved, with quiet eyes, a firm mouth and a pleasant, rather grave expression. He nodded a "good-morning" at his fellow passenger and busied himself with his luggage at the rear of the stage while Ross entered the Weller House.

It was seven o'clock, and the hotel guests were just entering the dining-room in answer to the first call for breakfast. The proprietor of the house, who knew Ross, motioned him to his table, leaving the second passenger to find a seat at a table a few feet away. To the proprietor, presently, Ross broached the subject of the disturbance in Miners' Camp. His host gave a quick glance at the next table and answered evasively :

"Oh, a boundary dispute. I've not followed it very closely. Some tangled up, I'm thinking."

"Well," declared Ross, "I'm interested in getting it untangled so I can write my father about it. He wants to get at the facts in the case."

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His host looked up. So did the stranger at the next table. So did half a dozen others within ear-shot.

"Your father ——" repeated the proprietor inquiringly.

"He's backing Dad Page," Ross began. "And ——"

A foot pressed against his gently, although the proprietor merely coughed and dropped his eyes. Ross halted, glanced about, saw the interest attaching to his words and heeded the pressure of the foot. His face flushed, and he welcomed an immediate change of subject.

"Let's see," began the proprietor precipitately, "you know Bill Travers, don't ye? He's on the Miners' Camp stage yet."

"When—when does it start?" stammered Ross.

He was uneasily aware of the continued interest in the faces around him. To himself he wondered why such a statement should elicit that curious questioning stare. What if his father was backing Dad? Why did the proprietor stop him? He would ask as soon as they arose from the table. It was evidently not a subject to be pursued now even in an undertone. But he did not have an opportunity to ask. Before he had finished breakfast, the stage to Miners' Camp announced itself outside in the stentorian tones of its driver, Bill

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Travers, and the proprietor hurried out of the dining-room.

When Ross went out to the waiting stage, he found his fellow passenger stowing away a shapeless bundle, tightly strapped, under the rear seat, and Bill Travers, from the driver's seat, was asking, "Is it Miners' Camp, stranger?"

Then, not noticing Ross in the group that was assembling to see the stage off on its forty mile journey, the driver raised his voice facetiously:

"If any one wants t' hike out fer Miners' Camp 'n' all way stations, this is th' last call they'll hear before th' train starts. Whoa there, kittens! Mind yer heels!"

Then his eyes fell on Ross Grant, his two suit cases and the—to Bill—familiar "emergency chest." He reached down a welcoming hand, shouting:

"Bless my boots! If here ain't Doc Tenderfoot come agin t' Wyomin'! 'Lo, Doc. Git up here 'side o' me. Got t' cuttin' folks up now 'r only puttin' 'em together straight when they meet up with accidents? Goin' up t' camp as assistant, eh? Well, it might so be ye're needed there. Git out o' this, kittens! Air yer heels!"

The four "aired their heels" all day long, first through the fertile valleys of the Gray Bull and Wood River and then among the grim black foothills, rising higher and higher to meet the loom-

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ing peaks of the Shoshone Mountains. Bill Travers handled his four bronchos skilfully as they left summer behind in the valleys and climbed the difficult trail between peaks which arose higher and higher until the ponies slipped over the rotting ice that choked the trail for miles before Miners' Camp appeared.

Ross's destination was the Gales Ridge "diggins" where Dr. Scudder had been housed, and to which the post-office for the entire camp had recently been transferred. Both physician and office, as Bill informed Ross, were located in the same shack. From this information Bill parted willingly. He was also loquacious on the subject of Lucky Frace and Nicholas Page, remembering Ross's connection with them the summer before, but he had nothing to offer on either subject which was not already known to the boy. Lucky was in Frisco a-meetin' with success, he said, in th' matter o' gettin' together a passel o' men willin' t' put up money fer th' runnin' of th' Elk Hoof mine. Wouldn't be back home yet a while. As fer that monkey o' a Nick Page—he'd be hikin' along in two 'r three weeks, so Dad said.

All this information rolled fluently from Bill's tongue, but on the subject about which Ross was most anxious the driver's information ran unexpectedly low.

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The new doctor, he opined vaguely, was a good enough sort of feller—hadn't had to be cut up t' any great extent himself. The off leader of his four "kittens" had trod on his foot 'n' mashed a toe 'r two one day 'n' Dr. Scudder had fixed 'em up all right. Yes, he was liked in camp, Bill guessed, s' fur as he knew.

Mindful of his experience in the Weller House, Ross approached the subject of the dispute in camp cautiously and without giving the information which had awakened interest there. To his surprise, the loquacious Bill was likewise cautious and informationless. Before speaking he glanced warily over his shoulder at the back seat. Ross noticed the glance, but did not connect it with the speaker's lack of information. The stranger had put on his overcoat again and was regarding everything about him with interest except the occupants of the front seat.

Bill, leaning toward Ross, lowered his voice to a mere mutter and said, yes, he'd heerd talk of some fuss 'r other in camp. Some fool surveyor had made a hull batch of mistakes on Dundee—folks was all mixed up over the boundaries of their claims and pretty sore, but Seven and Eight was the climax of mix-ups, claimin' as they both did the intersection of two leads where they was likely a pocket o' passable ore, t' put it mild, 'n' both

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Dad and Kansas bound t' git t' that pocket first. No, he hadn't an idee who was in the right of it, and he didn't know anything much 'bout the camps takin' sides in the matter. There was talk, of course, but what did talk amount t' anyway? Thus Bill meandered verbally as his four "kittens" wearily approached Gales Ridge, the entrance to Miners' Camp.

The wagon trail followed the windings of Wood River, here but a dashing creek that cut a deep channel between the mighty bulk of Dundee and Gales Ridge.

"Whew!" exclaimed Ross, bending his head back until his neck ached in a vain attempt to see the towering peaks. "These mountains seem just as ready to keel over and smash me as they did last year!"

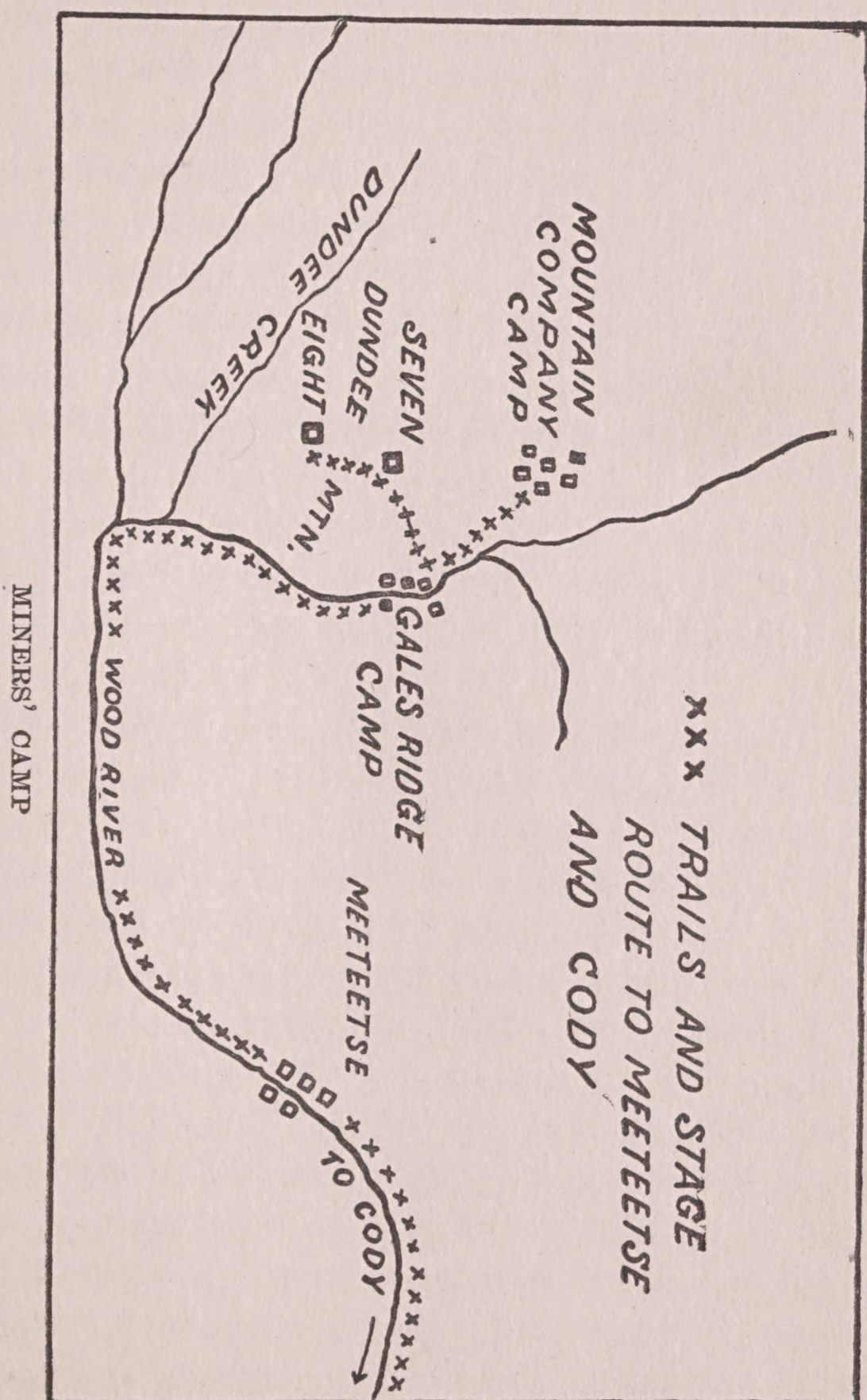
"Uh-huh," assented Bill. "I've noticed they sorta keep tenderfeet still and starin' fer a while at first." Then he spoke over his shoulder: "Say! ever glimpse these mountings afore?"

"No," from the back seat.

Bill cleared his throat. He liked replies of one syllable only when he was not in quest of information. He pointed at the side of Gales Ridge with his whip. "Ever see flowers bloomin' at the edge of a snow bank, like that, afore now?"

Being exposed to the hot noon sun the face of

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Gales Ridge was bare in extensive patches, sending down into the deep recesses of the cañon a breath of belated spring; the quaking asp was bursting into leaf, while myriads of wild flowers bravely crowded the melting snow masses. There were the white and yellow soapweed, the blue-bell, the yellow aster and the pink and white forget-me-nots.

The stranger smiled broadly at Bill's back as he answered, "Lots of times—in Arizona and Mexico."

"I guessed so!" Bill muttered triumphantly, but what he guessed he did not say.

At six o'clock the four "kittens" creaked across a bridge of bending saplings, and brought Ross within sight of the Gales Ridge "diggins" and Dr. Scudder's shack.

This cabin stood on a ledge cutting across the face of Gales Ridge not far above the wagon trail. Here and there in sheltered spots not far from it stood shacks, tiny affairs, homes of prospectors or of those men in the employ of the mining company who preferred to "bach" it rather than to occupy the crowded bunk house and eating shack clinging to the mountainside high up near the mouth of the Gales Ridge tunnel. These familiar features, however, did not interest Ross. His eyes were fixed eagerly on the figure of a man waiting

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beside the trail, his hands thrust into the pockets of his trousers, a gray sweater buttoned to the chin of a smooth face, a cap pulled down over a high forehead until the brim shaded a pair of heavily lidded tired eyes.

"'Lo, doctor!" Bill Travers sang out as the leader of the four poked an inquisitive nose toward the waiting man. "Here's Doc Tenderfoot come t' town agin. Same boy, only bigger'n ever and likely not s' tender!"

Ross removed himself from the high seat with difficulty, as the immense altitude of the place made him giddy at first, and shook hands diffidently with his superior.

"And this is Doc Tenderfoot," was all the greeting the older man gave him; but as their hands met, Ross's heart warmed toward the other with his cordial, rather musical voice and his thin, delicate face.

The hand that Ross's closed over was also thin and delicate, and in the midst of the new impressions crowding in on the younger man was the belief that the delicacy in the other's physique accounted for his burying himself in Miners' Camp, two miles above sea level, eighty miles from a railroad, with a continent between himself and his old associations. With the feeling that this was the satisfactory answer to one of the ques-

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tions which he had been asking himself ever since his first conversation with Dr. Gaynor on the subject of Miners' Camp, Ross helped Bill Travers unload his baggage while the passenger on the back seat viewed proceedings silently. His destination was evidently the upper camp.

After tumbling Ross's light luggage out of the stage, Bill tossed down into the boy's strong hands various boxes and bags containing supplies for the Gales Ridge boarding-house. The last thing which he picked up was an old "telescope" bag tied around with a small rope. Instead of handing this to Ross the driver stepped down over the wheel and tucked it in among the supplies without comment, at the same time glancing expectantly up the mountainside. Ross's gaze followed his to a tiny cabin nestled in a group of pines at the end of the ledge. The door was open, but the interior was so dark that the boy could see merely the outlines of a figure in the doorway.

Meanwhile Dr. Scudder had slung the lean mailbags over his shoulder and started up the trail. As Ross followed slowly, loaded with his own traps, the doctor asked genially over his shoulder, "Well, how does it seem to get back here? Natural?"

"I hope it will," responded Ross. "But last year there was no such fuss going as I understand

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is being stirred up now—over the Dundee claims, I mean.”

The other returned no answer. The figure had left the tiny cabin among the pines and was coming down the trail. The doctor nodded as they met with a muttered, “Evening, Wort.” The man touched the cap drawn down over his eyes and hurried past.

Ross looked up at the cabin again and found a second figure had taken “Wort’s” place in the doorway, a smaller figure, as he saw on a nearer view, a boy about his own age, but not of his own stature either mentally or physically. As the two drew near on the trail this boy dodged back into the dark, windowless interior of the cabin, although Ross felt that his vacant eyes were peering through some crack between the unchinked logs.

The ledge, or rock shelf, on which the doctor’s home stood, had but one approach, and that was through the pines and past the door of this dark cabin. The shelf itself projected beyond the front of the long shack only ten feet. From the edge was a sheer drop of fifty feet or more to the side of the mountain. Although there were evidently several rooms in the log structure, there was but one outer door and that opened into the “office,” a large room with a heater in the middle of the

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room surrounded by benches and a floor of dirty pine planks.

The doctor retired at once to the post-office department, a stack of post boxes standing on a shelf in one corner in front of a high half sash window. Ross dropped his suit cases and umbrella and with a muttered explanation that he was going back after his chest, had reached the door when the doctor's voice recalled him. The doctor was speaking in a serious but guarded manner:

"There's just one piece of advice I want to give you, Grant, first thing, and that is about this controversy in camp. If you know when you're well off you won't take sides. Better keep your ears open and your mouth shut in the matter. I do."

"Thank you," returned Ross. "I shall, too, but I'd like to hear about it from you."

He sat down on the end of a bench and looked expectantly at the post-office. There ensued movements behind the screen of boxes, but no voice. Ross coughed suggestively. Still no words.

"The fuss is between Dad Page and some one called 'Kansas' Brown, is it?" he finally asked, embarrassed by the silence.

There was an appreciable pause and then a "Yes," so short and so suggestive of a period to all information that Ross flushed and hurried out of the shack in pursuit of his emergency chest.

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Running along the ledge he surprised the boy standing among the pines peering furtively down the mountainside. The latter dodged behind a tree, Ross being between him and the refuge of the cabin door, and again the newcomer caught a brief glimpse of a vacant face. Without speaking he ran down the trail and met the man whom the doctor had called "Wort" coming up. The man was climbing carefully, holding in his arms the old rope-bound telescope. Over it his eyes met Ross's in a fleeting glance and then were lowered. As the boy passed him with a muttered greeting he heard the sharp click of glass knocking glass, but so chagrined was he at the doctor's plain rebuff that he thought but little of the sound or man or the vacant-faced boy.

There was no suggestion of a rebuff, however, in his host's manner when he again entered the office, his chest balanced on his shoulder.

"Ready for your room?" was the pleasant query.

"I am that!" assented Ross as the doctor picked up his suit cases. "I want to get into a flannel shirt and a sweater and put these glad rags away for good."

The other smiled genially: "The room will go better with the sweater than the 'glad rags,' but I presume you've stayed in rooms like it before—and slept in a bunk."

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"Oh, a bunk is all right," assented Ross. "I slept in 'em for a year—and I tell you I *slept*, too."

Dr. Scudder turned with a long look at his assistant. It was a look that puzzled Ross. There was in it more of longing than scrutiny.

"You slept well, then?"

"Like a log."

"Lucky," the doctor commented briefly, leading the way through the kitchen. Pushing open a rough door he set the baggage down in a little lean-to, exclaiming, "Here you are! It's the best I can do for you. It was formerly the cook's room, but he's bunking behind the kitchen stove now."

"It's all right," Ross declared, and at once set about settling while the doctor departed.

The floor of the lean-to was of uneven rock while its ceiling was dirt-chinked logs. It contained a bunk nailed to the side logs, a short bench and a half sash window that slid back to admit air, a needless precaution, as the air rushed in between the logs and under them. In the middle of the room was a tiny sheet-iron heater with a stovepipe piercing the roof. At the head of his bunk was a shelf on which he arranged his books and the few toilet necessities he had brought. Under the shelf he stowed his emergency chest.

The previous year that chest had accompanied

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him into the mountains well stocked with every "first aid" needful which Dr. Grant and Aunt Anne could crowd in it. But this year such a course seemed absurd in view of the fact it was to rest under the roof of a physician who must keep on hand a medical store sufficient to supply a camp. That is, it seemed absurd to Dr. Grant and his nephew. But Aunt Anne's lips were pressed firmly together on the declaration that the chest must accompany Ross just the same.

"All right, Anne," her husband had said indulgently, "if it will help you to happier dreams—here goes!" And he had shouldered the chest and marched into his office, followed by Ross.

When the chest departed Aunt Anne supposed it contained all the needfuls it had held before, but uncle and nephew knew that it held but a meager store of appliances, the space being filled with the books over which Ross expected to pore during the vacation.

He had just drawn on a sweater and hung a hand mirror on a nail over the shelf when Dr. Scudder's voice sounded at his door: "Well, Grant, are you starved?"

Ross opened the door. "I'm always nearly starved in the mountains."

Dr. Scudder smiled. "I think Hank here will be able to keep you filled."

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Ross stepped into the kitchen and faced Hank. To his surprise Dr. Scudder raised his right hand silently and with long, tapering white fingers made rapid signs and gestures to which Hank responded merely with a nod. Giving the newcomer another nod he busied himself setting the food on the table.

"Hank is a deaf-mute," the doctor explained, turning to Ross. "But he can cook and keep the place reasonably clean—and I'm not long on conversation myself."

Something significant not only in the tone of the last remark and in the rather long pause preceding it but in the speaker's very atmosphere arrested Ross's attention. It seemed to him he had bumped up against a sign-post. The impact of the mental blow embarrassed him as it had in the office, and, at the best, Ross had not a surplus of self-assurance. He sat down with his back to the stove, facing a window that looked over on Dundee. He answered the doctor's perfunctory questions concerning his trip, lapsing into silence at the end of each answer, and presently his host fell silent also, without having once referred to the University nor Philadelphia nor Dr. Gaynor.

Ross, puzzled, stole an occasional glance at him until he saw that he might look as long and openly as he chose, his host having seemingly for-

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gotten his existence. He was eating rapidly with an air of not knowing what he was putting into his mouth. His movements had become singularly nervous, an attitude Ross had not noticed during the few moments he had seen him before supper. His long fingers would close about his cup tensely one moment and allow his fork to slip through them the next. His eyes, which seemed too large for his face, he did not raise from his plate.

After a light supper, he left the table abruptly and with a muttered reference to Bill Travers and the mail for the morning, went into the office. Pausing a moment only behind the post-office boxes, he opened a door leading into a room of which Ross caught only a glimpse. The next moment the boy heard the click of a lock the other side of the closed door.

A week before back in Pennsylvania, the sound would not have arrested his attention even, but here it did. He had not known, as he told Lambert, that Miners' Camp contained a lock. Open doors were the order among the mountains. He was not able, however, to comment on this nor anything else to Hank eating noisily at the end of the table. So he finished his supper speechlessly and wandering into the office looked the room over carefully. Opposite the outer door was the door that was

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locked. Between it and the kitchen door, nailed against the logs, was a cupboard with a glass door. The three upper shelves in this cupboard held bottles of all sizes filled with liquids, and tablets of various colors. Over the lower shelf were strewn surgical instruments in a disorderly array. Under the cupboard stood a large trunk.

With his hands stuffed into his pockets and whistling in a low key, he was surveying the surgical outfit in a cursory fashion, when the outer door opened and two men entered. The first was evidently a Mexican. He was short and swarthy. His left arm was in a sling. He sat down on the bench near the stove without looking at Ross, and dropped his head on his right hand, his elbow on his knee. His companion Ross thought at first glance was the stranger in the stage. But a second glance showed him a younger man, although he was tall and lean with the same quick, pleasant eye and thin, sunburned face. This man, however, had a beard.

"Good-evening," said Ross.

"Evenin'," returned the American civilly with a glance about the room. "Doctor in?"

Ross nodded toward the locked door. "Shall I call him?"

"Might as well," glancing toward the dejected

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Mexican. "Rod's got a bad arm. Doctor told us t' come at this time."

Ross went to the locked door and rapped. There was no response. He rapped again with the same result. "I didn't see him come out," he said finally, "but he did, probably, and I didn't notice."

As he spoke he stooped and looked at the lock. The door was hung loosely and he could see that the bolt was still shot. Either his host was in that room or he had gone out another way.

"Guess you'll have to wait a while," he said, and returned to his survey of the instruments, but not before he had noticed a belt and six shooter bulging the American's sweater at the hip.

On top of the cupboard a nickel clock ticked loudly. The fire snapped cheerfully in the heater. The man on the bench breathed heavily as though in pain. Outside, the wind began its evening soughing through the trees. From the room behind the locked door there came no sound whatever. Ross moved away from the cupboard uneasily and stood in front of a window whose dirty panes commanded a view of Dundee rising precipitately the other side of the cañon. Suddenly, from its face high above the shack, came a deep muffled roar which reverberated among the peaks.

"Somebody's put a shot," he observed.
"Who?"

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The American had sat down on the bench beside the Mexican. He did not look up, but his forehead contracted involuntarily as he answered: "Dad Page, I guess."

"In Number Seven?" asked Ross for the sake of making conversation.

The other gave him a quick glance then from under black brows. "Yes, in Seven."

At that instant the bolt in the adjoining room clicked, and Dr. Scudder entered the room smiling pleasantly, his movements totally unlike the movements of the man who had shot the bolt half an hour before. There was not a trace of nervousness in his manner, which was buoyant. Ross's astonishment at the transformation, however, was swallowed up in interest at his greeting:

"Hello, Kansas, how's Rod's arm?"

Ross, with difficulty, suppressed a whistle. This, then, was "Kansas" Brown, owner of Dundee Eight, the claim which encroached on Dundee Seven, owned by the elder Grant and Dad Page!

CHAPTER III

THE HOSTILE CAMPS

KANSAS answered the doctor's question with a shake of his head and the laconic answer: "Hurts 'im yet."

The Mexican winced at the doctor's touch, his face distorted with pain.

"Uh-huh," muttered Dr. Scudder slowly. "Of course it hurts. Those powder burns always are painful." Then he turned to Ross. "Kansas, this is my assistant. He just came this evening. He's Ross Grant in the East, but all the name I've heard from those who knew him here last year is 'Doc Tenderfoot.'"

Another glance from under the black brows and a muttered, "Yeh, I've heard of Doc," was all the greeting Ross received from the owner of Dundee Eight.

His manner was non-committal but not unfriendly. When Ross was looking elsewhere Kansas Brown studied him. The boy felt the scrutiny and returned it as Kansas bent over his

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Mexican employee, assisting the doctor to undo the bandages on the burned arm. It was to his employer rather than to the doctor that the sufferer yielded. Kansas was singularly persuasive both in his manner and in the voice that jabbered to the Mexican in his own language.

"The chap in the stage is certainly his near relative," Ross decided.

This thought brought others in its train not agreeable, in the light of Dr. Scudder's advice. He had not connected the stranger with Dundee Eight, but the proprietor of the Weller House evidently had when he touched Ross's foot with his own. The boy's speech had not been checked, however, before the occupants of the dining-room had heard the one important statement that the elder Grant had a financial interest in one of the disputed claims.

"Well, what of it?" Ross asked himself. "I wonder it wasn't known before—there's no reason for keeping it secret—a mere business transaction! Still—Dad always was close mouthed."

Then he turned his attention to the business in hand.

Sitting astride the bench occupied by his patient, Dr. Scudder proceeded to attend to the burned arm. Ross, watching every move closely, admired the long white, skilful fingers touching the shrink-

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ing arm gently but firmly. Presently the physician hesitated and looked up. "It's close here, Grant," he said abruptly. "Open the door, will you?"

Ross did as he was bid, despite the Mexican's evident chill as the cold air filled the room. He wondered a little at a direction which gave the patient so much discomfort, but his attention was immediately distracted by a further request. The doctor sat looking down at a package of sterilized cotton in his hand, his forehead puckered into a frown. He glanced over his shoulder once at the medicine cupboard, and the frown deepened. Ross wondered at his delay with the burn exposed to the air and the patient in such evident distress.

"Grant," said his chief suddenly, "happen to have anything—well, you spoke of your emergency chest—did you put any bichloride of mercury or Dobell's ——"

"Yes," interrupted Ross. "I have a bottle of Dobell's tablets—the only disinfectant I brought along."

The last words were spoken over the chest itself as the boy hurried into his room and laid his hand immediately on the bottle. There was no time to wonder at the doctor's request for, presently, the solution made, to his delight he found himself manipulating the arm with the older man standing by, directing, correcting, commending.

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"They told me here in camp, Grant," the doctor exclaimed when the arm was at length replaced in its sling, "that Doc Tenderfoot knew more than some doctors with sheepskins!"

Ross flushed diffidently and made no reply. He was looking at Kansas Brown getting the Mexican into his sweater. There was a deftness and kindness in the American's movements that attracted the boy.

"Ever done such a job alone before?" pursued Dr. Scudder, standing in the doorway, his hands in his pockets.

"Yes, often," answered Ross. "You see, I have lived with my uncle, Dr. Grant, ever since I was a kid and I've always taken to everything surgical. He lives in the mountains above Wilkes Barre in the coal mining district, and such cases are everyday occurrences. I've helped him a lot, and then, sometimes, when a miner would be brought to the office injured, and uncle not there, I've fixed him up. Of course, afterward, uncle saw to it that the job was rightly done, and there I learned a lot, for he always had me around when he was looking my work over. In that way I've had some real practice."

"Evidently," said the doctor, "you take to surgery as a duck does to water—eh?"

"I like it! and I suppose where you like to do

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something it comes—well—handier to do it than if you didn't care."

"Always wanted to be a doctor, have you?" was the next question.

"Why," cried Ross enthusiastically, "I'd rather do such a job as that than—than—eat! And that," with a laugh, "is saying a good deal, as you'll find!"

During this conversation Kansas Brown had been putting the Mexican into his sweater carefully, heeding every move that gave Rodrigo pain. Over the Mexican's head his eyes were taking full measure of the newcomer, a boy in years, a man in stature, the combination making him rather shy and easily embarrassed except in the pursuit of his chosen profession. There he dropped his boyhood and stepped unconsciously into confident and enthusiastic manhood. The sharp scrutiny in Kansas Brown's eyes changed into amusement at Ross's last remark and he laughed outright, and for a pleasant moment the eyes of man and boy met in an understanding way. Then Kansas handed Rodrigo his cap and the two left the shack.

Dr. Scudder followed them, glancing over his shoulder. "Put those things away, will you, Grant?" he asked, motioning to the medical paraphernalia laid out on the bench.

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Ross did as he was bid, dividing his attention between his task and the two on the ledge. As he was closing the cupboard door he bethought him of the Dobell's tablets. He had not come across the bottle containing them. He looked about anxiously and had dropped on his knees to hunt beneath the heater when he recalled seeing the doctor drop the bottle into his coat pocket after taking out the tablets necessary for the solution. Picking up a pair of shears that had dropped to the floor he stepped to the door intending to ask his chief for the bottle, but the latter was so deeply engrossed in conversation with Kansas that Ross did not interrupt him, but stood waiting to speak.

Into the physician's manner had crept the strange suppressed nervousness that seemed to Ross to undermine his natural force and poise. His hands were aimless in their movements, going alternately from his trousers pockets to the pockets of his sweater. His very walk was infected with a nervous lack of purpose as he followed Kansas along the ledge. He lowered his voice to an undertone, but it reached the boy's sharp ears in urgent fragments :

"Kansas," he asked, "is this interfering with work in Eight?" He nodded toward the Mexican's arm, but Ross could not hear the other's reply.

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"We must reach the intersection first," then came the doctor's voice insistently, "for I've got to have money, Kansas, I must have money—I was a fool to sink money—to go into the thing when it's uncertain—and more uncertain now than ever—with this fuss—and Dad may come in ahead—the intersection must make good—I'd sell out if I could find a buyer—and now Rod's arm ——"

Into this anxious agitated incoherent torrent of words came Kansas' cool level tones. "With my brother Jean come to-day and on the job now, doctor, we won't miss Rod's arm. We're goin' to reach the intersection first—that'll be a cinch—but you're in the thing, and I don't see no way out if ye can't find a buyer ——"

"I've written to my brother—I must have more money ——" the doctor was beginning, his voice rising in his anxiety.

Kansas, with a backward glance at the shack, touched his arm, and the two moved further away from the office door.

Inside the office Ross dropped the shears with a clatter. When Kansas spoke of his brother, the identity of the stranger in the stage was made clear. But when Dr. Scudder mentioned his brother, there fell into Ross's consciousness the memory of a gray-haired man in front of the col-

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lege library and of a chance bit of information he had given which explained the otherwise incoherent remarks of the physician. Ross picked up the shears and stared frankly out of the open door at the group on the ledge. Kansas saw him, and with a low word to the doctor silenced him and, without further speech, swung off down the trail, followed by Rodrigo.

"Bring him up again to-morrow night about this time," the doctor called after them.

He came back into the office, his lips moving as though he were saying to himself the words Kansas had interrupted. He did not seem to see Ross, although he was obliged to walk around him in order to reach his room toward which he plunged at once. Again the lock clicked, and after a moment there was silence in the room.

"Well," muttered the boy, looking at the door with puzzled eyes, "this beats me—this and a few other things!"

The bottle of Dobell's was forgotten. He filled the heater with wood and sitting down beside it grasped a knee with both hands, brought it up near his protruding chin and sat thinking, his eyes narrowed and thoughtful. In the kitchen Hank moved about washing dishes. A frost-bitten breeze came in at the open door, counteracted by waves of heat from the reddened pine-filled

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stove. Ross sat quietly going over the situation with painstaking care until, as suddenly as it had closed, the doctor's door opened and he appeared, calm, pleasant, clad again in the commanding personality that dominated Ross—and perplexed him.

"No such first of July as they're having in Pennsylvania—eh?" he remarked carelessly with a glance at a curl of snow overhanging a ledge high on Dundee. Then he turned to the medicine cupboard.

Ross glanced out of the door at the snow-curl flanked by the green of the stunted spruce and the blackness of the rock. Then he dropped his foot to the floor with a bang and began resolutely:

"See here, Dr. Scudder, I'm in a queer position here. How queer it is has only just occurred to me, and I guess I better tell you right off the bat! Maybe you don't know——" he paused uncertainly.

The doctor opened the lid of the trunk and tossed in a roll of bandages. He looked over his shoulder in surprise: "Queer? How? What do you mean?"

Ross gave an embarrassed laugh. "Of course, it doesn't make any difference—not a bit, really, only I always feel better when I get things off my chest and begin square—if I've got to live around with—folks."

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Dr. Scudder stood motionless, listening intently to this awkward speech, his back still turned to the speaker. There was a tenseness in his attitude that was lost on Ross.

"Well—square about what?" he asked finally, and his voice was also tense.

"About my being here and ——" he paused and changed into, "You see I met your brother one day before I knew I was coming here."

The doctor moved suddenly, but said nothing.

"It was back in April," Ross went on. "He was visiting the University. He was with a lot of fellows in front of the library and they introduced me because I had been up here last year and I could tell him about the camp. You were here, and he was interested."

Dr. Scudder still did not look around. There was a pause during which Ross considered and the doctor listened. At last the latter said, "Well? you said you were in a queer position ——"

"Yes, I am. It's like this, doctor. Your brother mentioned that you were interested in a mining claim owned by Kansas Brown ——"

"Oh—did he?" the doctor interrupted. There was a curious note of relief in his tone. It was evidently not what he was afraid of hearing. He went to the door and looked out. "Yes," he said nodding, "I am, but, Grant, I'm a silent partner—"

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remember that. No one here, except Kansas, knows that I'm interested—and now you—but I know I can rely on you. I—we—must not take sides in this matter, as I've told you. It's far too serious. Feeling is running high here these days. It would take only a little thing to act like a lighted match in a keg of powder. You see, we are public characters, you and I, in a way. We are employed equally by both camps."

Ross bent over his knees and studied the planks underfoot. "I won't mention it, of course," he promised, "but the queer thing about the matter is—maybe you don't know it, but I'm afraid it's no secret in camp—my father is backing Dad Page!"

"Your father!" exclaimed the doctor. "Are you the son of the Grant who owns mining property all around here? Queer I never associated the names. Why, Dr. Gaynor wrote me that you needed ——" he paused abruptly.

Ross continued the unfinished sentence. "Wrote you, probably, that I needed a job of some sort this summer. Well, I do. My father is financing a lot of enterprises, but I'm not one of them!"

The doctor turned with a quick appreciative smile, and looked his young assistant over. "Your father evidently knows when it's best to finance enterprises and when it's best to let enterprises

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finance themselves," he exclaimed with warm emphasis. Then he returned to the main subject: "But you say the camps know that your father is back of Dad Page? Perhaps they do, but it's news to me."

Ross explained the occurrence in the Weller House. "Anyway," he ended, "except for the way things are here there'd be no sense in making a secret of a business matter like that. And after what I said in the hotel it can't be a secret now."

Dr. Scudder slipped his hands into his pockets. He leaned against the door-jamb in an easy attitude, an upstanding, handsome, dominating figure now, a nerve-shaken, unseeing, unhearing figure half an hour before. In a kind and reasoning tone he reassured Ross:

"While it would be better not to have it known, I think you will be able to disarm prejudice, if there is any, by strict attention to your own business—our business. When I said at first, Grant, that we are public figures in camp, I meant this: I am not paid by the job, individually, as we are usually; each man pays by the month, the men in both mining companies and the prospectors all through these mountains. Each man, according to agreement, hands over a dollar a month, and it's up to me for that to give him all the medical attention he needs. Now, take Rodrigo, for instance. If he

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needs care for a month I give it—but he pays only his dollar. On the other hand, nine-tenths of the men never require any attention, so the thing evens up that way.”

“I see,” assented Ross. “I see, too, where you—and I now—come in as sort of public property.”

“Yes, that’s the idea.” The doctor hesitated a moment and then continued: “For a few days now, until the two superintendents get back, things may be—well, rather precarious.”

“The superintendents?” Ross’s voice arose inquiringly.

The doctor nodded. “Yes, of both upper and lower camps. They’re in Chicago attending a convention, and the foremen are running the mines while they’re gone. The superintendents are strong men. They hold the miners in check, but now—well, it’s the part of wisdom now especially to avoid taking sides.”

“But the men will naturally think I’m on Dad’s side because I’m my father’s son,” said Ross ruefully, “when, as a matter of fact, that would have no influence on me when it comes to my work as your assistant.”

The doctor nodded understandingly. “That’s the right way of looking at it, Grant, and I think, as I have said, that the men will soon understand that you mean to mind your own business.” Then

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he added, "Just one thing further: Because of the situation here, and my position, and because this is the post-office, this ledge is strictly neutral ground, and both camps recognize it as such—with a few reminders occasionally from me! Here both parties meet without quarreling. They avoid quarreling, I notice," with a smile, "by not speaking, but that's better than speaking too much!"

Dr. Scudder's manner changed suddenly. He stood erect and shook himself a trifle impatiently. His thoughts seemed to relinquish their hold on the subject of the camp complications and turn inward again, arrested by his own last words. "Yes," he repeated slowly, "it's better not to talk too much. Questions—incessant talk——" he shrugged his shoulders and went abruptly behind the stack of post boxes.

There was in this last remark the same significance that had abashed Ross at the table and prevented him from asking any questions on the origin of the fuss between claims Seven and Eight.

Suddenly Dr. Scudder called out with quick insistence: "See here, Grant, you may as well take a lesson in post-office work right away. When I'm not here you'll be postmaster as well as chief surgeon. Come back here and make out a post-office order, please. I must see to having you sworn in. We're not troubled much by inspectors,

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and things aren't run as strictly as they are in more accessible places, but the work is done well enough to suit the camp."

Ross, shivering from the inrush of the frosty air from the doorway, followed behind the stack of post-office boxes and gave heed to the rapid directions issued by his host. "Here's a book of instructions," Dr. Scudder finished abruptly. "Study things out for yourself. It's time for the boys to drop in now. If there are any money orders asked for, make 'em out and leave them in the envelopes for me to sign. I'll attend to them in the morning."

With this curt order, Dr. Scudder, with the air of winding up his duties for the day, started toward his room.

"But — doctor — see here — hold on!" Ross blurted out.

"What is it?" The older man turned in his doorway and looked at the boy impatiently.

"Why ——" Ross ruffled up his hair helplessly. He glanced at the inviting benches around the heater and at the post-office boxes and the medicine cupboard. Then he finished awkwardly, "Aren't you going to stick around here—to-night at least—till I get the hang of things?"

"The hang of things," the doctor repeated. "You have all the directions necessary. The men

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of the upper camp don't gather in here. They lounge around MacFadden's store at the upper camp. There's never any trouble unless some one's drunk. Then all you have to do is to throw him out, provided he doesn't go at your request. I"—here Dr. Scudder's tone grew indistinct as he backed into his room and closed the door—"I—can't be disturbed to-night—no sleep—must ——"

The lock clicked, and Ross was left alone in the office gazing at the locked door in speechless astonishment.

"Say!" he exploded mentally. "What is he, anyway? Smooth as silk one hour and rough as tweed the next! Calm as a summer sea and then as nervous as a witch! And not one word about Philadelphia nor the University nor Gaynor nor anything. Well, if he doesn't want me to talk I can keep still, that's one thing certain—but he's a conundrum!"

The boy scratched his head above a puzzled face, closed the outer door and sat down beside the window with his book of instructions; but he did no reading. He was more uneasy at the moment over the other's strange manner than over the prospect of being obliged to keep order in the office. It must be that his conclusion when he first saw the doctor was correct; he must be suffer-

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ing from sickness of some sort that affected his nerves. And yet the more Ross saw him the less he was impressed by the idea of physical illness in connection with his chief. His speculations were soon interrupted by the entrance of two men, one of whom, Wort, he had met twice on the trail up the side of Gales Ridge in quest of a heavy telescope bag. Had Ross been in any doubt before as to the nature of the contents of that bag the breath of the owner would have settled the doubt. Wort sat down beside the stove while his companion approached the post-office corner and nodded through the opening at Ross.

"Evenin'. I'm lookin' fer a paper. Name, Harve Sickler."

"Good-evening," Ross responded.

After some effort he located the paper, and Harve returned to the stove in time to secure a corner seat before it was taken by others of the denizens of the camp who were lounging in, many of them greeting Ross cordially as "Doc Tenderfoot." They were the men he had run across the year before while working in the mountains near Miners' Camp.

At first the embryo postmaster was so busy hunting out letters and papers from the unnamed and unnumbered boxes that he had no time for general observation. But presently he began to

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notice that when a newcomer entered the room if he were greeted by the group about the stove he joined them; if not, he called for his mail and left without so much as a glance in their direction. Ross recalled the doctor's meager information and concluded that these were the men of the upper camp who foregathered, not at the post-office but at MacFadden's, whoever he was.

"Now I wonder," Ross thought, surveying the occupants of the benches through the glass of the boxes, "which man these are with, Dad or Kansas." This the doctor had not explained.

With a view of finding out, he pretended to busy himself behind the boxes all the evening, listening for remarks that would throw some light on the question, but he heard nothing.

The group had drawn the benches close to the heater, which they kept well filled, and sat smoking, swapping an occasional yarn, or breaking out with some bit of news brought by Bill Travers. They were dressed as they had been all day in the mines, in sweaters and high rubber boots. Some were accoutered, like Kansas Brown, with six shooters at the hip, but they looked far from formidable as they hunched lazily forward, baking one side and then the other in the heat from the red-hot stove, and filling the room with tobacco smoke until the lamp, high against the side logs,

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shone through a haze dimly. With the smoke was mingled the sickening smell of scorching rubber and the steam of hot earth.

Presently Ross saw that a ripple of secret communication was flowing under the general wave of conversation. He strained his ears until he caught his own title of "Doc Tenderfoot," but the connection he could not get at first. He sat down on the bench in his corner, and pretended to write, leaning forward so that his ear came close to the post boxes. It was evident that he was the subject of comment, but not until the comment had worked around to Wort did he find out what it was. Wort was sagging forward, stupid and sleepy, and did not catch the full meaning of the whisper that was being passed over his bent back. He straightened himself and stared at the whisperer.

"Hey?" he muttered. "What's that ye say? D'ye say his father is ——"

Harve's foot on one side and a sharp elbow on the other ended Wort's question, but Ross understood its purport. Either Bill Travers or Jean Brown had told what he, Ross, had said to the proprietor of the Weller House. He was annoyed that it should be considered important enough to be repeated in this covert manner. His first impulse was to leave his corner and announce frankly to the group that it made no difference to him

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which claim his father was financing—he was in camp merely as Dr. Scudder's assistant and not to take any part in factional differences. He arose to carry out his impulse and then as impulsively sat down again. It was the part of wisdom to keep in the background quietly until he found out something more of "how the land lay" in camp. And, furthermore, as the doctor had said, the camps would soon learn by his actions that he was strictly neutral.

By nine o'clock the last loafer had drifted out of the shack, leaving Ross questioning whether it were official closing time or whether there was such a time. He rapped once on the locked door, but received no reply, and heard no stir inside. Therefore, he blew out the lamp, closed the door, and taking the office money with him, threw it into a sock and went to bed. Before going to sleep he promised himself that he would visit Dundee Seven the next morning and ask Dad Page for an account of the fuss in camp, its origin and progress. He was disappointed that Dad, whom he had known well the year before, had not come to the office that night.

The following morning the strong light from the half-sash striking him full in the face aroused him. The light preceded the sun by two hours, owing to the obstructing peaks. Hank was already

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rattling skillets and pans, and the aroma of coffee floated in at the open door. Ross yawned and disentangled himself from the heavy blankets in which he had slept. As he hung his feet over the side of the bunk he grinned reminiscently at the rolled blanket that made a harsh pillow and thought of his Aunt Anne's well laundered bedding.

"Say!" he muttered with another jaw-stretching yawn. "Aunt Anne doesn't realize this sort of thing even after all I've told her."

A chunk of dry mud from the chinks overhead fell on the rock floor as he crawled stiffly out of the bunk and shivered in the cold wind blowing in at the half-sash.

"The second of July—whew!" he exclaimed to Hank as he dipped a basin of water out of a brimming pail in the kitchen and proceeded to wash.

Hank returned his friendly grin and said something with his free hand while the other turned bacon in the skillet, but Ross did not understand. Going into the office he found the doctor's door was still closed, and a moment later Hank summoned him to breakfast by banging on a tin pan. Ross stood in the doorway and, catching the deaf-mute's eye, pointed to the doctor's room. Hank shook his head violently, motioning Ross to his

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bench beside the table. The two ate a silent breakfast with the third place unoccupied.

Before breakfast was finished Bill Travers' voice sounded from the office door. Bill's "kittens" stood on the trail in the cañon while he came up after the mail-bag. To Ross's surprise he went at once behind the post boxes and picked up the empty mail-bag.

"Guess doctor ain't up yet," he mentioned carelessly to Ross who had hurried into the office.

"No, shall I call him?"

Bill was fixing the date in the stamp with the deftness of one accustomed to it. "No, never mind. Used t' this. It ain't accordin' t' yer Uncle Sam's way of doin', but the thing is t' git it done before noon 'n' git started fer Meeteetse."

Bill whacked the stamp on the few letters that had been left the evening before, tied them and dropped them into the mail-bag. Then he turned to Ross, lowered his voice with a cautious glance at the locked door and returned to the subject on which he had exhibited so much ignorance the previous day.

"Say, Doc, I couldn't tell ye about Seven 'n' Eight last night, with Kansas Brown's brother right back of us. Probably ye know the hull mess now."

This, Ross considered, was an excellent oppor-

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tunity for an exhibition of his policy of neutrality. "No," he returned, yawning indifferently, but truthfully, "I don't know anything about it."

Bill leaned against the shelf behind the post boxes and glanced again at the locked door. His manner became more confidential.

"Ye see," he began, "Seven and Eight overlap right at the intersection of the leads. That was the fool work of a surveyor s' sick he didn't know what he was about. He had weak lungs. He made a hull botch of mistakes and then cleared out. He's likely passed in his checks sence. Leastways, no one has heard from Razorback Jones since."

CHAPTER IV

"THE BOOK OF FORGETFULNESS"

At the name, Ross could not repress a startled exclamation. "Razorback!" he cried. "Did you say Razorback Jones?"

Bill's eyes lit up at the boy's tones. "Huh! So ye know somethin' about Razorback yerself, d' ye?"

"Why—I've heard of him," Ross returned guardedly, remembering that news was meat and drink to Bill both in the gathering and the dispensing.

"What have ye heard?" the driver urged, almost in a whisper.

"I've heard his name," evaded Ross.

"Seen Dad Page, have ye?"

"No."

"Doctor told ye, mebbe."

"No," shortly, "Dr. Scudder has not mentioned the name to me."

"Sh!" cautioned Bill, his eyes on the bedroom door. "Not s' loud. He don't take no sides in this matter, as you'll find, and he won't let it be talked here in the office."

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"How can he prevent it?" asked Ross to divert Bill's interest in his own knowledge of Razorback. Dad Page was the only one entitled to this knowledge.

Bill scratched his ear, while a puzzled expression overcast his face. "Wall, you tell if ye can! We know he don't want it talked around this office, and we don't talk it, that's all—unless it's when he's in there—with the door locked! Then we know he's——"

It was Bill's turn to stop now. He glanced speculatively at the assistant and waited as though for a lead in the matter of further information concerning the doctor. But Ross's attention was diverted, and he made no reply. Afterward he recalled Bill's tribute to Dr. Scudder's native force and commanding personality, but now his thoughts were playing around the University Hospital and the Westerner he had forgotten to visit, and the letter that through his forgetfulness he had never written. He wondered about that letter. He could recall accurately every detail he had learned in April connected with Razorback, and mentally he was kicking himself for his carelessness in the matter of calling on him. Especially did he regret the letter the sick man had wished written by some one who understood gold mining, and Ross recollected that this wish fol-

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lowed the reading of some item concerning Miners' Camp, possibly the same that he had sent to his father.

"There!" he told himself in exasperation. "If I had remembered to visit him a second time I might have got at the bottom of all this muddle before I came here."

Then he found Bill Travers speaking of the relations between the upper and lower camps, and again listened.

"As ye know, Doc, the miners these two companies have here is the owners of claims all over these mountings, so they hang 'round here and earn their three plunks a day and see t' it that their claims don't git jumped. Wall, as it happened, when this here ruction begun, most of the men that sided with Dad Page was in this camp, while Kansas Brown's men was in the upper one. And it didn't take the others long t' swap places, I tell ye! That's how it's come that now the hull upper camp's with Kansas agin th' lower camp, with Dad, and pretty hot both camps is jest now—and the Fourth of July comin' on, and it a holiday fer all hands!"

At this moment a sound of jangling trace chains from the cañon caused Bill to grab the mail-bag and depart on the run to rescue the ear of his night leader from its trace mate's teeth. Ross followed

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to the edge of the ledge and stood with his hands in his pockets watching until the stage rolled out of sight down the cañon. Then, shading his eyes with his hand, he threw back his head and made a vain attempt to see the summit of great Dundee opposite. But the cañon was too narrow, and the rock mass opposite too precipitate. It towered into the piercing blue of the sky without showing him its snow-capped, treeless peaks. But he knew they were there and under them, a thousand feet higher than the ledge on which he stood, were claims Seven and Eight, surveyed—after a fashion—by the man he had failed to interview in the hospital of the University of Pennsylvania.

The Book of Forgetfulness loomed largely in his consciousness. It lay now on the shelf in his room. The last entry concerned this same Razorback Jones. He had made it on the train from Philadelphia to Harrisburg as soon as possible after being reminded of his forgetfulness as he was leaving the University dormitory. He remembered the relief with which he had written the entries, especially the last line :

I. Things I Have Forgotten to Do.

Call on Razorback Jones at the University Hospital. (Westerner who wanted to see some one else who had been in Wyoming.)

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II. Immediate Result of I.

None. Man didn't even know of my existence.

III. What I Have Done to Remedy I.

Nothing. Did not discover forgetfulness until too late for any remedy.

IV. Results of III.

None. Nothing gained and nothing lost.

He scowled uneasily now at Dundee while the conviction lay heavily on him that when Razor-back arrived in camp and he learned what the surveyor would have said to him had he visited the old fellow at the hospital, it would be necessary to change those entries.

"And I hate to change 'em—like a dog!" groaned Ross. It was one thing to accept the fact that he was becoming more and more careless—accept it with cheerful unconcern, and quite another to arrange his fault and its results in a methodical and businesslike way, submitting the same to the very one from whose eyes he most desired to conceal all faults.

Just then a bolt was drawn behind him and a door opened, succeeded by steps across the office floor. The doctor was up, and Ross was turning to join him when his attention was attracted to Wort's cabin by a prolonged creak of protesting hinges. The occupant of the shack was stand-

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ing in the doorway calling in a silly, unsteady fashion :

"Here, you Mucker! Come erlong back here! I don't aim t' tech ye, ye loony! Come back!"

In the slight figure which had darted out of the shack and was fleeing down the trail, Ross recognized the vacant-faced boy. Advancing curiously to the cabin, the newcomer greeted Wort who drew back muttering: "Mucker, he's got a queer notion in his head, he has."

"Who is Mucker?" asked Ross, stopping at the door.

Wort regarded him with a vacuous smile. "M' boy," he answered, sitting down on a box. "W-Where'd he go?"

"I don't know," Ross replied, backing out of the doorway as he glanced about the room.

Opposite a rusty little stove was a bunk filled with dirty blankets. Other blankets lay in a heap on the earth floor showing where some one, presumably not Wort, slept. There was a home-made table, a bench, a few broken dishes and the open telescope bag in sight. The only air and light penetrating to that unwholesome interior came from the doorway. Wort fitted perfectly into this scene. His woolen shirt was grimy. He sat there leering stupidly, a caricature of the man he might have been, and Ross, with a dis-

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gusted glance, retreated. He had turned back to the office, when the sight of a man on the trail up the side of Gales Ridge caused him to hurry down.

"Dad!" he shouted. "Hello, Dad Page!"

The man halted half-way up and, raking off his cap, wiped his face on his shirt sleeve, for the sun was riding high now and pouring its heat down into the cañon, stilling the wind and laying siege to the banks of rotting ice and snow.

"Wall, Doc, howdy?" grinned Dad as Ross reached him. "I was comin' up t' see ye jest a minute. Why, boy, ye're somehow growed up more."

"Why not?" laughed Ross. "I'm a medical sophomore at this present minute, and surgeon's assistant in Miners' Camp!"

"I'm some glad t' see ye here, and so will Nick be when he gits here," assented Dad, gravely shaking hands with a grip of steel. "It wouldn't hurt me none," he added, looking about, "t' set down hereabouts instid of clamberin' up this trail."

They sat down on a near-by boulder and, basking in the hot sunshine, plunged into the subjects Ross was longing to learn about.

Page was "Dad" all through the mountains. The powerfully built owner of Number Seven was also deputy sheriff of Big Horn County, but this

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fact did not account for the six shooter he wore at his hip. Ross had never seen him carry a gun before save when he was fulfilling the duties pertaining to his office, and the boy had seen him often. He was the one man in camp that Ross had determined to talk with as freely as, it was evident, Dr. Scudder talked with Kansas Brown, and not only because the elder Grant had a share in Seven, but because Dad was a man to be trusted under all circumstances.

"Now, Dad," Ross began, "I want to get to the bottom of the fuss over Seven and Eight."

Dad sagged forward, his elbows on his knees, his hands loosely clasped between. "I wisht," he returned simply, "that I c'd git t' th' bottom of it myself, but I guess no one can but Razorback Jones, and he has vamosed."

Ross laid an eager hand on the older man's shoulder. "I know where he is—that is, I know how to get hold of him!"

Dad sat up and looked incredulously at Ross. "You! Git a-holt of Razorback? How?"

Ross explained while Dad listened with growing eagerness. "Git a-holt of 'im, Doc, if so be ye can!" he urged. "Tell 'im I'll pay his way out here. If he was so sick when he made th' survey that he let his helpers do about all of it he'll remember who his helpers was, and where they're t'

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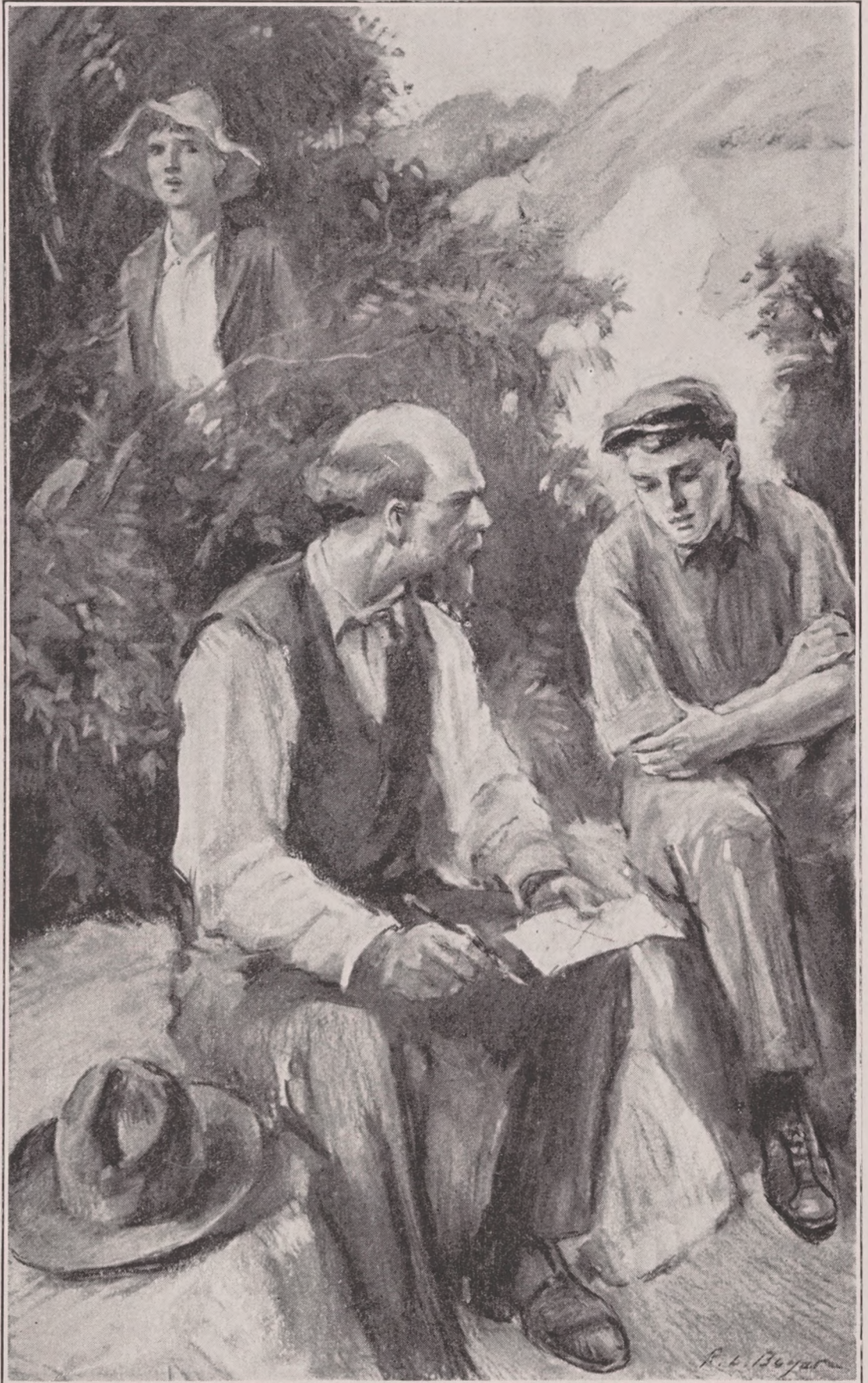
be found, and among 'em they can straighten this thing out. Git a-holt of 'im, Doc!"

Then the excitement faded from Dad's face and he dropped forward again, elbows on knees, continuing meditatively: "I want th' thing cleared up as much fer th' sake of the hull camp as fer myself. Things is gittin' thick here"—he touched his gun—"and they won't git no thinner 'til the boundaries is settled."

"In what way," Ross asked, "is Razorback to blame? What about the survey? And why should all of Miners' be taking sides when only two claims are involved ——"

Dad held up a restraining hand. "More'n two claims is involved. I'll have t' go back t' th' beginnin' t' have ye see it right. Have you got a piece of paper handy, so I can sort of make a drawin'?"

Ross produced an envelope and his fountain pen, and for a few moments Dad bent laboriously over marks and letters. Ross watching intently became aware, presently, of being watched. He looked around quickly, only to catch a glimpse of a vacant, boyish face and staring eyes peering furtively around a rock behind them. Instantly the head was withdrawn, but not before Ross had recognized the same frightened watchfulness that the boy had bestowed on Wort the previous day when



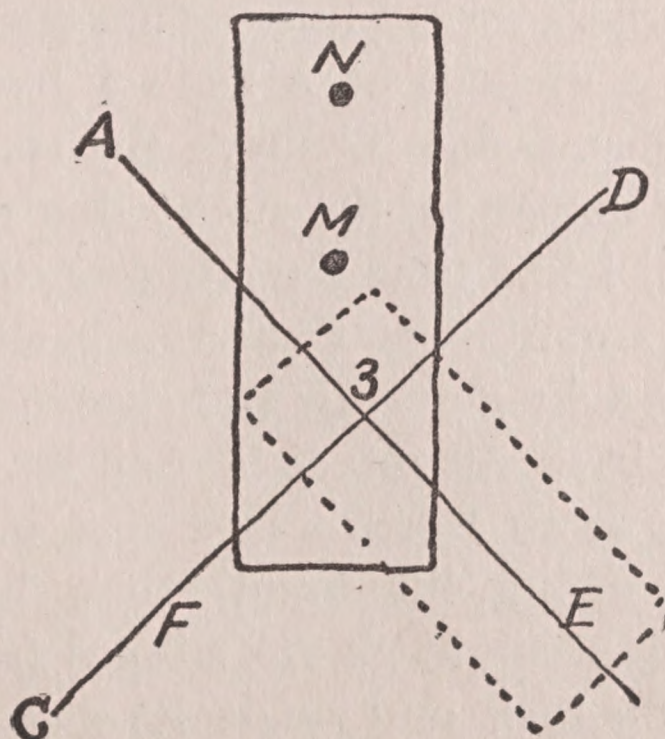
“I STRUCK A GOOD VEIN OF ORE”

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that individual was coming up the trail with the telescope hugged tenderly in his arms. Ross opened his lips to ask about the boy when Dad, straightening his shoulders, began his explanation of Dundee Seven and Eight.

"Years ago, Doc, when gold was first found in the quartz of these mountings, and before prospectors took up with the idee of comin' in here much, I come. I bought a ranch down in Wood River valley, 'n' then I hiked up here, climbed Dundee 'n' begun nosin' 'round with a blowpipe 'n' sich. You remember that. You was here then. Well, finally I struck a mighty good vein of ore that lays like this:"

Dad paused and spread the envelope on his knee, pointing with the fountain pen.



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“ We’ll be supposin’ that this here envelope is the side of Dundee over yon,” he pointed at the mountain opposite. “ Then this space I’m markin’ out here is a ridge of rock about fifty feet high that runs up ’n’ down Dundee away up there ”— he transferred his attention from the paper to that part of Dundee nearest the sky—“ so fer up that ye can’t see from here. We call it ‘ Dundee Ledge.’ Wall, I struck int’ a fine vein, A E, of ore at this here spot, E. So I staked up a claim here and dug my discovery hole, put up my notices, ’n’ like an idiot went below t’ my ranch without findin’ out—then—that there was another vein C D, that intersected A E, at 3. But still, I was all sound on that intersection ’cause my claim covered it as I had staked it. Ye can see that it does by this here dotted line. That stands fer my claim, and a dickens of a time I had t’ climb up on Dundee Ledge ’n’ drive the stakes. But, knowin’ my notices ’n’ the hole I dug would hold the claim ’til I had time t’ put in some more assessment work, I went down t’ my ranch, as I’ve said.”

Dad drew a long breath and stretching his feet out, pushed back his cap as though he was finishing a hard day’s work. Dad was more accustomed to working his hands than his tongue. Behind them a slight figure slipped from behind the sheltering rock and made its way from boul-

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der to sage-brush until the stage trail was reached. Then it sped up the cañon and out of sight.

“About the time I left the mountings,” Dad continued, “a feller name of Allan come here. He found this here vein C D, and staked it up to my claim. So fer all was as it should be. This Allan was a stranger from Kansas. I didn’t know nothin’ about ’im. Didn’t need t’. Neither of us recorded our claims at th’ time we staked ’em. It wa’n’t necessary. The stakes and notices would hold all right in law.

“Wall, while I was foolin’ ’round on my ranch, th’ mountings here promised t’ git right pop’lar, and I made up my mind it was time I had my claims reg’larly surveyed and recorded, and here’s where Razorback Jones comes in. I sent ’im up to do the work. All I knew about ’im was that he done surveyin’. I didn’t know that he had bad lungs and was too sick t’ work proper and good. He come up with a couple of men—don’t know who—and made the survey and brought it down to me. I seen he was lookin’ white ’n’ peaked ’n’ sick, but I never thought about its interferin’ with his work. All the directions I give ’im was t’ make his measurement from the biggest rock on top of the ledge. It sticks away up above the others ’n’ can be seen from all around, ’n’ looks likely t’ stand there fer ages.

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"Wall, when he brought th' survey t' me I looked it over and seen that he described that rock a lot. I didn't know before it was anything but plain 'rock' a-towerin' high above the rest of the ledge jest a little above my claim boundary.

"But Razorback he wrote as how he had taken measure from a 'huge rock with a dome-shaped top 'n' a shoulder projectin' toward th' north, etc.' I hadn't never noticed the exact shape of that rock, but it read all right t' me 'n' I took th' survey t' Basin, the county seat of Big Horn, and had it recorded as 'Seven,' because there was six more claims below it on Dundee.

"Wall, before I found out Razorback's mistake along come Brown from Kansas and bought out Allan, on t' other side of th' ridge. He says that Allan told 'im t' fix over his claim accordin' t' th' survey, and not accordin' to my stakes, because th' stakes wa'n't right, so he got a surveyor and they went by Razorback's survey and run Eight right over my stakes and took in the intersection of the leads. He needn't tell me," bitterly, "that at th' time, when he seen that them stakes didn't tally with th' survey, he didn't know Razorback had made a mistake! No, he needn't tell me!"

"But I don't understand, Dad," Ross broke in. "Had Razorback taken measurements from the wrong rock?"

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Dad scratched his head. "He must 'a' measured from the right rock, because he left the stakes standin' where I put 'em, but when he come t' write out the survey he must 'a' been seein' double or else he 'n' the fellers helpin' 'im got mixed up, fer he up and described a rock five hundred feet above the right one. See here," Dad held up the envelope. "I told 'im t' make N his start fer measurin' and he must 'a' done that, but in the survey he described the rock at N, a long way from M, ye see."

"I see!" exclaimed Ross, enlightened. "If you let your stakes tell the story of the boundaries of Seven that dotted line is right. But ——"

Dad took up the statement solemnly. "But if the court, when it comes t' settle th' business, throws out th' evidence of the stakes and accepts Razorback's survey—why, it pushes this hull claim off the lead five hundred feet, where there ain't any ore."

"And yet you accepted it."

Dad writhed helplessly. "I was a blockhead not to check it up myself. But any jury'll see I'm right."

"Can't you serve an injunction on Kansas and make him stop work until the matter is settled?" asked Ross.

Dad smiled grimly. "Yes, and so he could on

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me, and I'd have t' stop too! So we ain't either of us doin' that, but we're workin' all the men our tunnels 'll hold night 'n' day. The feller that gits t' th' intersection first—if he finds a pocket of gold there—why, he'll be the richest feller, eh?"

Ross nodded understandingly, and glanced at the six shooter.

"But," he broke out suddenly, "this doesn't explain how the other claims are affected."

"That's this way!" explained Dad. "When the other prospectors filed their claims, 'cause ours was th' first t' be staked, they jest took my stakes as the beginning of their measurin' on the right side of Dundee Ledge and Kansas Brown's on t' other side. So if the court accepts the survey as it's recorded fer Seven it'll push my claim five hundred feet from where I staked it and the others beyond it will have t' move along too. And if Eight is backed down the mountingside all the claims below 'll go down too, and as we've found the ore is richest nearest the intersection all the claim owners on my side want my claim to stay as it's staked, while all the owners on the left side of the ledge want me backed off'n the intersection and want Kansas' stakes t' hold."

"And the men who don't own anything are taking sides with those who do, are they?" asked Ross.

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"That's the idee," assented Dad. "I never seen Miners' in the state it's in now." Then, slowly, "I know I'm in the right of the thing, but fer the sake of the camps ——"

He came to a stop and scowled at a freight wagon rattling down the stage trail. "Wall, git a-holt of Razorback if so be ye can, and I'll stand by the outcome if it's agin me. I don't like fusses," touching his gun distrustfully.

"And yet you are the most efficient deputy sheriff in the county!" exclaimed Ross.

"I don't like fusses!" declared Dad again emphatically, and then both fell silent watching the freight wagon.

Its driver stopped at the foot of the trail up Gales Ridge and tied his team to the trunk of a pine tree. Then he came leisurely up the trail. In front of the two on the rock he paused.

"'Lo, Dad!" he said carelessly, glancing at Ross inquiringly.

"Howdy," said Dad civilly. "Goin' below?"

"Yep. Packed up a load of canned stuff fer the upper camp from Meeteetse." He still paused, but Dad seemed unaware of his presence longer. He was gazing up at Dundee, and had forgotten to introduce Ross.

The stranger hesitated, looking at the young man. "Dr. Scudder in?" he asked.

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Ross nodded, and the man went on up the trail.

"Who is he?" asked Ross.

"Owns a ranch in th' valley," was the short explanation.

"He doesn't look sick!" Ross exclaimed. "But I suppose he must be, or he wouldn't be after the doctor."

Dad turned and looked sharply at his companion. "No, he ain't sick," positively. "It might be better fer the doctor if he was—too sick, that is, t' come a-hikin' up here."

"What do you mean?"

Instead of replying Dad asked curiously, "How did ye come t' git here, Doc—with Dr. Scudder, that is?"

Ross related the story.

"Never seen 'im before then?"

"Nope. Just think, Dad, he was a surgeon in Philadelphia once and lecturer in the University."

"Why didn't he stay there?" asked Dad sharply.

"Exactly what I'd like to find out," returned the boy warmly. "I don't know, but I suspect it was his health."

"I expect it was too!" assented Dad. He opened his lips, hesitated, and closed them again, all the while looking hard at Ross.

"He seems to be sort of a camp pacifier," Ross

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remarked absently. "They seem really afraid of him."

"Yeh," muttered Dad. "Guess they are when he's on deck ——" He broke off and hastily resumed the subject of Dundee Seven and Eight.

"Now, about Razorback, Doc. Jest keep it t' yerself that ye're tryin' t' git him. It's best in yer place here that ye don't take sides."

"So Dr. Scudder says," assented Ross. "All right. All right. 'Mum's' the word."

Dad heaved his big frame up from the rock. "It so happens," he continued, "that I hain't made mention that yer father is mixed up in Seven, so nobody knows here ——" Then he added before Ross could enlighten him on the subject of the camp's recently acquired knowledge, "I wisht that th' Fourth of July wa'n't a holiday. When men is on the ragged aide of a fight it's a good plan t' keep 'em at work, but that can't be done th' Fourth. I'm lookin' fer trouble then, especially with Boots 'n' MacFadden ring-leaders in th' camps, 'n' both jest a-spilin' fer a fight."

Ross, glad of an opportunity to avoid confessing his own speech in the Weller House, hastened to ask: "Is Boots in this camp?" His father's methods had made him ashamed of anything which might look like carelessness.

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Dad nodded affirmatively to the question. "Yeh, he's here, and Mac in t'other. Boots is in it 'cause he owns the first claim below Seven, 'n' Mac's in 'cause first of all he's got a grudge agin Boots—'n' me!"

Dad started down the trail, but stopped to call back, "Now if only they all felt called on t' hike out t' Meeteetse th' Fourth—wisht they might feel called on t' hike out t' Meeteetse. Down there they'd mix up with s' many others they'd sort o' fergit th' ruction here."

Ross watched Dad down the trail and out of sight up the cañon and then turned slowly back, looking up at the ledge. Standing on its edge looking down was the freighter who had passed them a few moments before, and Ross wondered if he had heard Dad's last remark. As the boy passed Wort's shack, the owner raised his head from the dirty bunk and called:

"Hey there, D-Doc! Seen m-my boy—Mucker?"

"Yes, I have," Ross answered shortly, and went on without explaining.

In the doorway of the office he was met by Dr. Scudder. His chief wore a light overcoat, gloves and hat. He answered the astonished inquiry in the face of his assistant by the careless information: "I'm going below now, Grant, with Sims here."

CHAPTER V

COLLIDING WITH A FIST

Ross stopped and looked at his chief incredulously. It was the first time they had met that morning, and the doctor looked ill. He was pale, with a pinched expression about the eyes and smoothly shaved lips. His eyes were peculiarly restless. They seemed to jump from spot to spot, his glance darting here and there over his assistant's face but refusing to meet the astonishment in his eyes. "Sims" grinned at the boy over the taller man's shoulder, the near proximity bringing out the innate refinement in the doctor's face, its hall-marks of breeding and education in spite of the overlaying film in expression and manner which so perplexed his incoming assistant. Sims' face was frankly marked by his life, reddened eyes, sags of flesh underneath, a blotched skin.

"Dr. Scudder here, he's goin' down with me fer a few days," added Sims ingratiatingly, viewing the boy's wordless surprise with a broadening grin. "The air away up here is so thin it don't agree with some folks—him especially."

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The doctor shrugged the shoulder next to Sims and said hastily, "It may be you've not seen my assistant before?"

Sims nodded. "No, I've never seen Doc Tenderfoot, but I've heard of 'im. Guess he can take care of the full business here all right while you're away."

For a moment Ross had been too dumfounded to protest. But now the protests broke out with spontaneous fervor: "Doctor, I know you can't be dead in earnest about leaving now. A 'few days' would take you beyond the Fourth. I can't be left alone in the office then."

Dr. Scudder turned aside and picked up his bag from a bench. He spoke as though he had not heard Ross. "Dress Rodrigo's arm to-night when he comes over. That's all there is on the carpet now. If there are any new cases you can handle 'em all right," carelessly. "I saw that yesterday."

Ross clutched the door-jamb. Probably the doctor, not allowing any discussion of the feud in his presence, did not know of the danger which lurked in the holiday.

"But, Dr. Scudder—listen." Ross raised his voice involuntarily, so peculiarly dead to sound did the other appear. "See here! Suppose there is an accident—and somebody gets smashed up. I couldn't handle a bad case. I don't know enough."

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"You'll get along in any case until I get back. Have to." The man's tone was as cold and colorless as the boy's was anxious.

Ross's eyes narrowed, and his chin shot out, a habit he had when in a "tight place." The doctor's seeming confidence in him, he felt, was not confidence at all but was assumed because of the latter's determination to "go below." He spoke rapidly, breathlessly, backing slowly out on the ledge as the doctor and Sims moved forward.

"Let me tell you. Let me remind you—I have been talking with Dad—and Bill Travers said the same thing—the Fourth of July is a holiday here—and with the camp in the state it's in—if there's a fight there'll be broken heads—wounds in plenty, likely, that I can't look out for—and with you away—and I strange to the place and only your assistant—you mustn't be away, that's all!"

As Ross's words came tumbling out, with an impetuosity born of his overwhelming anxiety, the man flushed and stopped waveringly.

"Oh, fudge!" cried Sims. "What a fuss! No danger at all! Come on."

He took the hand-bag from the doctor's hand and, pushing past Ross, strode across the ledge. The doctor flushed, paled, hesitated and then, without speaking, followed. At this sign of failure, the perspiration appeared on Ross's forehead and he

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burst out desperately: "One thing more, doctor. The men *who pay* you have a right to expect you to be on hand when they need you most."

This shot went home. Ross had recalled the other's urgent declaration to Kansas Brown of his need of money.

"Sims," called the doctor. "Wait."

Sims came back, still grinning. The doctor drew a long breath and wet his lips with his tongue. He seemed engaged in some internal struggle. Ross, watching breathlessly, wondered what attraction "below" had with that bleary-eyed Sims. It was Sims, however, who cut the Gordian knot.

"Wall, Doc," turning to Ross, "I guess you're right. Now you lay low and I'll have Scudder back here by the Fourth good and plenty. See?"

A haze of relief flashed over the doctor's face. "Yes, yes, Sims will fetch me up by the Fourth," he promised easily. "That is right, Sims. I should be here then, as Grant says."

Sims turned on his heel, nodding to Ross and addressing his guest: "Come along then, I'll get ye back here in time t' mend all th' bones that's broke on the Fourth. Come along." Then to Ross with good-natured contempt, "Look ye here, young man, that promise oughter rope yer tongue fer ye!"

Dr. Scudder drew a long breath of relief as Ross

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unwillingly accepted this promise by "roping his tongue." He hurried after Sims while Ross stood on the ledge and watched them go with many forebodings. He did not trust Sims' promise.

"It's a frame-up," he thought uneasily, "to stop my mouth and get the doctor off. I could have kept him here by putting the loud pedal on the idea that the men who paid for his services would expect him to stay. That was the only idea which stuck to him. He's in need of money, that's evident."

The boy took off his cap and ran his fingers through his hair. Dr. Scudder was not understandable. "There's just one thing here I'm sure of," he thought, "and that is the doctor's the oddest man I ever saw. Doesn't act alike for two minutes at a time, and no one would suspect he had ever seen the University of Pennsylvania. Not a flicker of interest in it or a question about anything!"

Ross watched the freight outfit out of sight and then, feeling that action was necessary to ward off an attack of the "blue funks," he went into the office and took stock of the medical appliances at his chief's command. Opening the trunk under the medicine cupboard he looked in. An unutterable confusion met his eyes, an astonishing jumble of tangled bandages, surgical instruments,

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books, absorbent cotton—all the paraphernalia of a surgeon. Ross whistled, and the perplexity in his face deepened.

“And he was once a surgeon in a big hospital in Philadelphia!” the boy exclaimed. “Well,” he shook his head and sat back on his heels, “I give it up! Guess the best I can do is to clean house and stop wondering over things!”

For half an hour he worked in the trunk, and then opening the medicine closet began to examine its contents carefully. Here a more astonishing state of affairs was revealed. The labels on the bottles did not, in every case, give a clew to the contents. Ross, familiar with the use of many drugs in his uncle's office, became confused and uncertain as he continued his investigation. Finally, he closed the cupboard door and sat down on the bench beside the stove. He was thoroughly dismayed.

“Such carelessness,” he thought, “I have never met with before. He has evidently taken tablets out of one bottle, failed to use 'em all, and dumped 'em back into the first bottle he laid his hands on. Why, such carelessness is—is—criminal!”

The last word not only checked his thought but seemed to rise up and hit him on the head. He leaned his arm on the cupboard and laid his face down on it. The perspiration broke out on his

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forehead. Who else beside the doctor had forgotten? He knew last night—and had utterly forgotten—that the bottle of tablets was in the doctor's pocket. Through his mind raced all that his father had said and written on the subject of carelessness—how, if first tolerated in the suburbs of his life, it would in time storm the very citadel of his chosen profession. That time had come, and the realization of it appalled him. He saw a certain paragraph in one of his father's letters as plainly as though it were before his eyes:

“—— and the price of success is too high for you to plant any obstacles in your path, and especially obstacles with such tenacious roots and bushy tops as carelessness and forgetfulness ——”

The ensuing hour was the blackest he had ever spent, with the humiliation of his personal failure added to the fact that his carelessness was endangering the life of the patient already entrusted to his care. He wandered into his room, but the sight of the Book of Forgetfulness gave him a feeling of actual nausea, and he hastily retreated to the ledge and the bracing air. He looked at his watch and estimated the hours that must elapse before the Mexican would come to have his arm treated. Then he shivered and buttoned his sweater up to his chin, but it was not the air which gave him a chill.

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Finally the pressure of the necessity to decide what he was going to do with that arm turned all his thoughts into one channel. He walked back and forth on the ledge with fists unconsciously clenched, and eyes unconsciously narrowed, thinking. What could he use on that arm? Where could he turn for a disinfectant? And always he came up against the fact that there was nothing available.

He had gone inside the office finally and thrown himself on a bench tired in mind and body when Wort staggered in, leaned uncertainly against the door-jamb and leered down at him. Swaying side-wise weakly, his legs far apart in the vain effort to steady himself, the newcomer demanded where "Mucker" had gone.

"Is 'Mucker' his name?" asked Ross absently.

Wort turned his hands over and looked at the backs as though he were but making their acquaintance. "Mucker a-ain't his real n-name. Men call 'im that. Name is—H-Henry. My bo-boy M-Mucker. He mucks in mine." Wort waved his hands up in the direction of the Gales Ridge holdings. "K-Know what muckin' is?"

Ross nodded. He knew that mucking is the lowest work a laborer in the mine can be set to doing—clearing away the mud that collects on the floor of the mine.

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Wort began again a minute examination of his hands. "He ought t-to be at it n-now," he broke out in an injured tone. "Ou-ought t' be ear-earnin' money fer his poor old pa ——" here the ready tears started and he staggered to his feet. "I w-want t' b-bring 'im back and s-set 'im t' work m-muckin'."

"It strikes me," retorted Ross, "that you might be at work up in the tunnel yourself without hurting you any."

Wort's eyes overflowed in self-pity. "Me? W-Why, Doc, I have—spells with my h-heart"—here he laid his hand impressively on the pit of his stomach—"have one—right now."

"Well," said Ross irritably, "you better go out and look for Mucker. I don't want you here any longer."

"W-Where'd I—look?" asked Wort.

Ross pointed up the cañon. "He went in that direction. I'd not tell you if I thought you'd catch him in a hundred years! But you can't. He can run like a rabbit."

A cunning expression overspread the drunkard's face. He attempted no further speech, but devoted the most painstaking care to his legs, which were unwilling to bear him down the trail and up the cañon in pursuit of Mucker.

This interruption had broken the line of Ross's

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thought. He had risen and was standing in the doorway watching Wort staggering down the trail, when suddenly a vision of Aunt Anne took the place of the drunkard—Aunt Anne reaching for a large bottle on the pantry shelf when he, Ross, as a child had run to her with a cut and bleeding finger. The label on that bottle, as it flashed before his mental vision, caused the boy to let out a yell which penetrated the cañon and brought to a standstill a man climbing the trail beyond Wort's cabin.

Ross recognized in him one of the Gales Ridge outfit who had occupied a place beside the stove the night before, and ran toward him shouting the one word, "Turpentine! Turpentine!"

"Hey?" asked the man in a startled tone. "Wot's that, Doc?"

Ross panted forth an explanation. "Up at the mine—somewhere—there must be turpentine. That is a disinfectant, a capital one! And there's none of any kind in this shack. Got any up there?" pointing up the mountainside.

"Yep," the man returned. "Got lots of it. I'm comin' back down in an hour 'r so and I'll bring ye a bottle that's not been teched."

Ross returned to the office feeling as though a new heaven and a new earth had been created. He was weak from the stress of his emotion but it

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was a weakness which was already passing, crowded out by the force of his relief. Now he could face the Book of Forgetfulness. Presently he took it down from its shelf and made his entries. With guilt and humiliation he wrote in his fault in full. With a feeling of very humble triumph he recorded briefly the remedy he had found, adding, "Aunt Anne never liked Uncle Fred's disinfectants because of the smell, and so she always used turpentine, and I happened to remember it."

After dinner and a brisk walk he had so far recovered his "nerve" that he sat down calmly behind the post-office boxes and commenced a letter to his father, explaining the situation in claims Seven and Eight as presented by Dad Page.

"This is the lay of the land on Dundee!" he wrote. "There are two veins of ore which intersect like a big X. Claim Seven—yours and Dad's—is on the right lower leg of the X, and Eight is on the left leg. Both Seven and Eight under their present surveys claim the intersection and all hands are working to get to it first and see what sort of ore it holds. Then they can see whether it's worth fighting for and, also, the actual possession will count for the side that has it when the court comes to settle the matter of ownership. But it's easy to see that the fight has

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got to be a personal matter with both Dad and Kansas and all the rest of the camp. Both sides want to come out ahead for the mere sake of winning. The ledge that holds the dome-shaped rock runs right through the intersection of the X up and down. Dad says it hides the mouths of the tunnels in Seven and Eight from each other and the shacks where the men live who are working the rival claims. Dad says it is a good thing it does, because the men can go about their own business better. The two sets of employees can't quarrel very well, as Kansas employs Mexicans that don't speak English, while Dad's Americans can't understand Mex."

Then he wrote briefly of Razorback Jones and his, Ross's, intention to try to get hold of him. "In the next mail," he continued, "I'll send a letter to Philadelphia and see what I can do toward running him down and bringing him out here to ——"

The writer did not finish the sentence. Through the glass fronts of the pigeonholes he saw a man pass the window hurriedly. It was Harve Sickler, one of the group which had occupied the benches the night before. As he opened the door the boy laid his pen aside and came around into view.

"Doc," said Harve hastily, "Kansas Brown has bust Wort's nose. The boys are bringin' 'im up

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now. Shall I have 'em fetch 'im in here 'r will ye go over t' his shack?"

"A broken nose and Dr. Scudder not here!" was Ross's first thought; his next was one of thankfulness that there was turpentine in camp and that he had thought of it. He went to the door and looked down into the cañon. Two men were dragging and pushing the drunken Wort up the trail, and at that distance the embryo surgeon could see a blackened eye and the bloody and "bust" nose.

"I'll do what I can for him until Dr. Scudder gets back," he said finally in a voice scarcely audible. "Fetch him here."

Harve stepped out on the edge of the ledge and cupping his hands around his mouth yelled: "Hey, Boots! Bring 'im up here t' Doc."

Ross returned to the post-office corner hurriedly, gathered up the loose pages of his letter to his father and stuffed them into the lock-drawer under the shelf on top of the bag containing Uncle Sam's money. Shutting the drawer with a bang, he tested it to make sure the spring lock had worked and then went into the kitchen to assure himself that there was hot water.

"How badly is Wort hurt?" he called back at Harve.

"Nose laid out agin his face," Harve answered,

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adding: "A bust nose on Wort don't matter. He ain't sober long enough t' find out whether it's straight 'r crooked. But"—with a change of tone, and a sharp look at Ross—"if Kansas Brown thinks he can git away with such work even on Wort—he better look out! This camp won't stand fer it."

Ross heard the threat, but had no time to heed it, nor to understand that the man was attempting to sound his own sentiments on the subject, knowing him to be the son of one of the owners of Seven. All the embryo surgeon thought of was the injured nose he must deal with. He had never helped to handle such a case as this before, and the fact that Wort was maudlin with drink and fear did not help any.

"Lay him on the bench," Ross directed as the men entered the office. "No, not on his back. On his side, face this way. Now the blood will run out of his nose and mouth. There, hold him quiet! Hold his head slightly raised—here—this will do."

Ross caught up a stick of wood and slipped it under the wounded man's head and pushed a handful of absorbent cotton between his cheek and the rough surface. "There! now hold his head firmly."

With the injured man before him, knowing

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that the responsibility of the case rested on his shoulders, all of the diffident boy in Ross had changed into the interested, alert, embryonic surgeon. He heard, without sensing, the low muttered sentiments concerning Kansas Brown. His entire attention was riveted on the nose. He directed one of the men, Harve, to hold Wort in position. The second man he sent up to the shaft house after the turpentine which had not yet arrived. The third man, Boots, who was small and spry, he sent into the kitchen to bring boiling water.

"Take these cloths," he commanded, producing some from the chest, "wring them out of the water as hot as you can and keep them over Wort's face like this below the eyes. That will help to staunch the bleeding. Hurry now."

Then he turned to the medicine chest and, kneeling in front of it, began to dig among its contents. His keen interest in surgery and his experience with his resourceful uncle who, as a country doctor and makeshift surgeon among the miners in the anthracite coal region, had taught him the value of devices not laid down in the books over which he constantly pored. In overhauling the chest that morning, he remembered coming across a bulb and tiny hose of rubber. It had once been attached to an atomizer, evidently,

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and had been discarded because age had stiffened the rubber. But the boy knew it would serve his purpose. Cutting the bulb from the pipe he took the latter and turned again to Wort who, choking with blood, was alternately begging for a drink and protesting against being burned by the hot cloths that Boots was applying with more industry than discretion. Harve had disappeared, but in a moment he reappeared bearing a bottle from Wort's store. As Ross turned, the injured man was reaching eagerly for it. As action was quicker than explanation, Ross seized the bottle and hurled it out of the door over Harve's head.

"His blood is thin enough and poisoned enough now," he jerked out, kneeling in front of Wort again. "Keep that stuff away from him."

This quick unexpected move did not tend to lower the men's idea of Doc Tenderfoot's efficiency. Even Wort turned his bloodshot eyes on his new physician with a certain awe which induced obedience and partial silence on his part. Without further comment, Ross measured the injured nose, and, the turpentine having arrived, proceeded in a task that excited the liveliest interest on the part of every one except the injured man.

"What's that rubber pipe fer, Doc?" asked Harve.

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Ross cut two brief lengths from the tube and laid them on the bench. "The nose has got to be held up in place," he explained slowly. "It's got to be stuffed full of something. I'm hoping these pieces of hose will turn the trick and let him breathe naturally at the same time. If I should stuff the nostrils with cotton he'd have to breathe through his mouth. See?"

"Where'd ye git that idee?" asked Harve respectfully. "Out of a book?"

"Nope," Ross shook his head. "I didn't get it from anywhere."

"Well, how then ——" began Harve in a puzzled tone, when Boots interrupted.

"Ye boob, ye! He means he got it out of his head." Then to Ross, "Did ye, Doc? Did ye think it up yerself?"

Ross nodded and, going to the medicine cupboard, selected an instrument with which he could raise the nose. This he carried into the kitchen and dropped into a basin of water and set it on the stove, explaining each move carefully to the interested men, without a thought that by so doing he was raising their opinion of him momentarily. In half an hour, the patient's pain having been deadened, he had lifted and straightened the broken nose, inserted the lengths of rubber tube in the nostrils and held the nose in place firmly

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with adhesive plasters across the cheek, which left only the damaged eyes and weak mouth in view. Presently their owner, looking about dazedly, called for a drink.

"See here!" cried Ross sharply, "that's exactly what he mustn't have. He's got to stay sober enough to guard his nose. If he should hit it or fall on it—that's what he would do if he were drunk ——"

"I'll tell ye what we'll do, boys," Boots interrupted. "We'll keep 'im up t' th' bunk house a while and look after 'im."

Ross gathered up the various surgical tools he had used, while the injured man sat up and leaned against Harve.

"Some one," suggested Ross, "better gather in all the whiskey he's got—and pour it down the hill."

He looked at Boots as he spoke. So did the others. It was natural, wherever a group of the Gales Ridge men were gathered together, for Boots to take command.

"Harve," he directed, "ye go over to his shack and hide the wet goods."

Ross followed the men out-of-doors and stood at the corner of the shack, watching Boots and the third man half boost and half carry Wort up the steep trail toward the Gales Ridge bunk house,

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the roof logs of which were barely visible from the ledge. Fainter and fainter grew the patient's whining, cringing voice.

Ross watched until Harve, who had entered the squalid cabin among the pines, came back carrying the old battered suit case that Bill Travers had lifted with such care from the stage.

"Say, Doc," said the bearer hastily, "this here is Wort's wet goods. Take it, won't ye? and keep it. It ain't ours t' pour out and we can't keep Wort from it if it's where he can lay his hand to it!"

Reluctantly Ross received the charge and carried it inside. "Where under the sun shall I put it where Wort can't find it?" he asked himself as the bottles inside chinked together. "If I could lock it up——"

He paused, glanced toward the doctor's door, whistled and nodded. Under the circumstances, Dr. Scudder could not think it impertinent of him to use that room and the lock on the door, providing the key was to be found. To his satisfaction it was in the lock inside. The room behind the lock was pleasant and well furnished. There was a bed with springs and mattress instead of a bunk, and a dresser and clothes-press. The rough floor was covered with a heavy rug, and a big leather upholstered chair stood beside a table lit-

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tered with books and magazines. The table stood beneath a half window that like all other windows in camp opened by sliding back in grooves. Ross, having deposited the bottle-filled suit case beneath the bed, started for the door when he noticed that the window was open a few inches.

"That won't do," he said aloud. "That man Wort wouldn't mind a little climb if the wet goods could be found at the end."

He pushed the table out of the way and looked through the dirty window down at the edge of the ledge.

"Huh!" he nodded. "Wort can't climb in here."

Directly under the window sheltered from view from any other point was a hole guarded by a huge boulder lodged in a crevice just where the ledge jutted out from the mountainside. Satisfied that it was practically inaccessible, Ross closed the window and was pushing the table back into place when the jar dislodged a small object which fell to the floor. Ross stooped to recover it and gave a startled exclamation, for small as the object was it carried a world of meaning to the embryo surgeon. It was innocent in itself, something to be found in the possession of all physicians—a hypodermic needle, but the sight of it in Dr. Scudder's room instantly explained the man's strangely vary-

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ing moods. Its constant use explained his retirement to his room periodically, explained the locked door which insured him privacy while he injected the morphine in his arm. The needle was broken and had been cast aside as useless. Replacing it on the table, Ross left the room, locking the door and putting the key in his pocket. He carried with him both enlightenment and perplexity.

In a silence enforced by the deaf-mute cook he ate supper. He ate heartily without, however, knowing what he was putting into his mouth. He felt that he was "up against it" with a chief whose habits made him singularly careless and irresponsible, and between two camps waiting like bombs with fuses inviting the match. And the more he thought of it, recalling the muttered threats of the men hanging over Wort, the more uneasy was he lest the fuses had been lighted when Kansas Brown "bust" the former's nose. So interested had he been in his surgical predicaments that he had not inquired why Kansas had felt called upon to do the "busting," nor where.

After supper, he returned to the office, intending to finish the letter to his father. He felt fairly grateful to himself and his newly-awakened faculties that in the anxiety attendant on the "bust nose" he had not forgotten to lock that letter, with its information concerning Razorback, away

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from any prying eyes. He felt that it would be a "cold day" before he could again look complacently on any act of carelessness, however slight.

Going behind the post-office boxes he sat down on the bench and putting his hand under the drawer worked the combination of the spring as Dr. Scudder had taught him to do and pulled out the drawer. But instead of going on with the letter he sat staring down at the jumble of pages, unable to draw his thoughts away from the tell-tale object on Dr. Scudder's table. He sat a long time thinking. He went back to the conversation he had with the doctor's brother and the guarded, hesitating way "chief" Gaynor had spoken of the camp physician. But more minutely did he consider the abrupt changes in Dr. Scudder's manner and his sudden transitions from depression to elation. And the longer he thought the more uneasy he became.

Finally a noise aroused him. He had heard it before. It was the protesting creak of Wort's cabin door. Telling himself that Wort had come sneaking back in search of the "wet goods" he arose idly and looked out of the window. Twilight had fallen and the shadows beneath the pines at the end of the ledge buried the shack in darkness. Behind the trees, however, a high bank was exposed to view and on this bank Ross saw a peculiar sight.

CHAPTER VI

THE STORM CENTER

OVER the top of this bank, from the direction of the Gales Ridge bunk house, figures were creeping, dim silhouettes only, in the failing light. Ross counted six as they slipped silently, one after the other, down from the bank and were swallowed up in the blackness beneath the pines. As the sixth figure disappeared, the watcher exclaimed "Boots!" He was recognizable by his stature and his spryness. Immediately there followed the slow creak of the cabin door, cautiously closed.

For a few moments Ross stood looking, listening and wondering. He recalled the contents of the cabin, no seats and no air, with the door closed. What could six men want with anything in the interior of that shack? Ross watched the exit from the group of pines, expecting momentarily to see the men emerge and go down the trail. But no one appeared, nor was there movement of any kind beneath the pines.

"Odd, somehow, that," Ross muttered. "It doesn't look right and yet—what can there be wrong about it?"

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And why under the sun, he further questioned, should the men clamber over that bank instead of coming down by the trail that led straight past Wort's cabin? What sense in such a laborious course when an easy one lay twenty feet away? Furthermore, he could not only hear no movement in the cabin but he could see no light. Surely, if the men were all crowded into that cabin, the door must be open for ventilation. Perhaps there was a light made invisible to him by the trees.

Curious, and also vaguely alarmed by the sinister secrecy of the affair, he determined to investigate without showing either interest or anxiety. Therefore he sauntered out on the ledge whistling loudly and discordantly, and proceeded to shy stones idly at the rock where he and Dad had been sitting that morning. A selection of stones of the right size took him finally along the ledge to the trees. Still whistling noisily and noisily flinging the stones, he worked his way to the front of the cabin and saw that the door was shut and the interior of the shack dark. He fussed about near the cabin until he heard enough movement within to assure him that his eyes had not played him false, and then he worked his way back to the office as carelessly as he had come.

At the office door, however, a possibility occurred to him of so illuminating a nature that it

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stifled his whistle and sent him swiftly to the medicine cupboard and the chest. Into his mind flashed the comments of the men who had brought Wort to the office—comments which Ross had scarcely heard at the time, but which, recalled now, all pointed threateningly at Kansas Brown, who had “busted” Wort’s nose. The trail by which Kansas must reach the office lay past Wort’s cabin, and Kansas was more than due now with the Mexican. Dr. Scudder had told him to bring Rodrigo to the office again that evening. This accounted for every move by the six men. They had come over the bank because the pines concealed it from a possible foot passenger on the trail from the cabin down to the cañon; they had closed the door and were waiting under cover of darkness and silence for Kansas—six against one!

Ross’s teeth came together with a click. The lack of fair play in the ambush aroused his anger to a point where it submerged his fear and intensified his feeling of acute responsibility. He knew it was up to him to save, not only Kansas Brown, but to step figuratively on the fuse which would blow the upper and lower camps into open warfare. What the six, under the leadership of Boots, intended to do he could only guess.

“Beat him up, maybe, but as he carries a gun, and some of them do, too ——”

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The boy shook his head and with hands which trembled, collected the things necessary for the dressing of Rodrigo's arm and stuffed them into his pocket. He did not doubt the accuracy of his conclusion. The only thing he held in doubt was the manner of his getting past that cabin at the end of the ledge without being stopped, for pass it he must. There was no other way of getting off the ledge, and he could not resort to any more such "kid's" play as he had used on his tour of investigation. As he was picking up the bottle of turpentine, he determined on his course. He took the bottle ostentatiously by the neck and swinging it on the side next Wort's shack, slammed the office door behind him, struck into a lively whistle and strode purposefully across the ledge, past the dark and silent cabin, and with a side glance at the closed door he turned up the trail instead of down, in the direction of the bunk house and his patient.

Once out of sight of the pines, however, he stopped under the shelter of a huge rock and, assuring himself that no one had followed him, he made a détour across the face of Gales Ridge in the fast gathering darkness, and then slipping and sliding down into the cañon, hurried up the stage track toward the entrance of the trail leading up the side of Dundee. Although not very familiar

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with this trail he had traveled it a couple of times the year before to Dad Page's holdings and knew that it was well defined. All he had to do, once the entrance was found, was to follow its windings up and up.

Half-way between the upper and lower camps he paused, uncertain of his way to the mouth of the trail. The darkness of the cañon was relieved only by a faint light reflected from the towering, snow-clad peaks. All about him stood pines and spruces, swaying in a gentle wind. Under them moved densely black masses of shadows twisting and writhing uncannily. Twenty feet below the trail between its worn and perpendicular banks rushed Wood River, narrow, snow-choked, tempestuous.

Ross stood still. He took off his cap and the wind cooled his head. It was damp with perspiration, while his unconscious clutch on the neck of the bottle had made his hand ache. As he was standing cap in hand trying to get his exact bearings, a footstep sounded on the trail ahead, and the next moment he was face to face with Kansas Brown. The meeting was a surprise to both. Ross stepped back precipitately, while Kansas' hand involuntarily sought his hip. As soon as he saw who it was his hand fell to his side.

"Oh—Doc Tenderfoot, ain't it?"

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"Yes," Ross answered. "I—that is—where's your man Rodrigo?"

"I was goin' over after the doctor," answered Kansas hesitatingly. "Rod ain't able t' hike over to-night. He's got a touch of fever and seems mighty weak. D'ye s'pose doctor'll come over?"

"He's gone," said Ross. "He went below this morning with a man named Sims. But I was on my way up to see to that arm. I—that is—it just happened so—the night is so pleasant—and I haven't been out all day. I wanted the walk."

He spoke with a confusion which caused Kansas to regard him narrowly. But all he said was, "Gone below, has he—again?"

Ross noted that "again" as he walked beside the other, across a foot-bridge made of a slender log with a wobbling hand-rail, but he asked no questions. Neither did Kansas, nor did he offer further comment, although whenever the trail was wide enough for them to walk abreast Ross felt he was being studied. When the trail narrowed he had an opportunity to look Kansas over as the latter walked ahead. He was the opposite, physically, of his opponent, Dad Page, a younger man with more agile movements, taller, more slender, and built with less waste muscularly.

The evening before, despite the man's taciturnity, Ross had liked him, and the liking held now, al-

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though it was evident that Kansas did not feel as much confidence in the assistant surgeon as Ross felt in him. There was something as trustworthy and substantial in the man's bearing as in Dad's, something which made Ross decide that he would "stand by a fellow till Doomsday if he said he would." He seemed the sort of a man whose simple affirmative would be as binding as another man's witnessed signature. Ross found himself wishing that Dad and Kansas were standing together rather than on opposing sides. He found himself making excuses for the latter in the matter of the boundaries of Eight. Perhaps he was honest in not suspecting that Razorback Jones had made a mistake in the survey of Seven, Dad to the contrary. It might be that Kansas had taken the boundaries as described in good faith.

"Why not?" Ross reasoned when Dad had, according to his own statement, passed on the survey and himself recorded it at the county seat of Basin. The thought seemed disloyal to Dad, good stubborn old Dad! and Ross scowled helplessly as he felt the clutch of the camp feud. Who was wrong, and who was right? Well, Razorback could answer the question, and Dad had expressed a willingness to stand by the decision. Would Kansas be as willing? Would the parties who were evidently led more by Boots and the un-

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known MacFadden be willing? Well, it would be his part to get hold of Razorback. He could do no more.

After a half hour of steady and laborious climbing, Ross, badly winded, paused for breath at the entrance to that elevated area on the side of Dundee that contained, midway, the claims of Seven and Eight. Through this area, between the two contested claims, was Dundee Ledge, a high rock spine, half a mile wide that ran straight up the face of the mountain for a thousand feet. From his position Ross could see the mischief-making, dome-shaped rock which surmounted the ledge. The trail now ran almost on a level across the mountain, skirting the foot of the huge ore dump from Seven, circling the perpendicular jagged end of Dundee Ledge, and extending below the dump of Eight on the further side.

Following his guide in silence Ross stumbled past the dump of Seven, his gaze turned upward, but the great pile of refuse ore running far up the steep side of the mountain shut off all view of the mouth of the tunnel and of the shack that the boy knew was located near the mouth. As he was traveling the last lap of the trail below the ledge it occurred to him that if the feud developed into open warfare Eight would have the worst of it in a matter of position, for the only feasible way to

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reach it was past the ore dump of Seven. When the two reached Eight Ross found its ore dump was parallel with Seven's dump and hidden from it by the ledge.

Beneath some scattered pines and spruces were three shacks, near the mouth of the tunnel. The largest was the eating shack. As Ross passed it he caught a glimpse, through the open door, of several men playing cards noisily at one end of an uncovered table. It was evidently the day shift off duty. Next to this shack was the bunk house, which Kansas entered.

Only one bunk was occupied, and that was by Rodrigo. The Mexican was tossing about feverishly, muttering in his own language to some one crouching in front of the bunk. Ross waited in the doorway, while Kansas struck a match and lighted a lantern hanging to the roof logs over a rusty little sheet-iron heater in which a few coals still glowed. The dirty lantern showed a dozen or more bunks with disordered blankets and straw, coats and slickers hanging about on pegs, a few razors, pieces of soap and other scanty toilet accessories lying on the projecting logs.

"Well, Mucker," said Kansas in an oddly gentle voice as he steadied the swaying lantern, "how's Rod?"

The crouching figure beside the bunk arose in

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a frightened, cringing way. When he saw that Kansas was not alone, he ducked as though dodging a blow and stood huddled together half bent. His head was well shaped and normal on the right side, but on the left, above the ear, there was a curious dent, around which the hair was gray. He had agreeable features spoiled by wide, vacant eyes.

As Ross advanced, he sprang back, with an animal-like motion, behind Kansas. The latter laid a hand reassuringly on his head.

"Won't he git me, Kansas?" Mucker quavered.

"Nope," returned Kansas soothingly; "nobody'll git ye here, Mucker. Ye're safe."

Mucker thereupon stood straight and peered out from behind his protector at Ross. The latter, drawing the dressings from his pocket, came in contact with some lemon drops he had purchased in Cody.

"See here, Mucker, like candy?" he asked.

The boy's eyes brightened with greedy desire. He came forward, a dirty hand extended. As the hand was being loaded with candy the owner winced and Ross noticed a sore on his palm.

"What's that?" asked Ross. "Hurts, doesn't it?"

Mucker put his hand with the candy into his pocket and held it there, making no reply.

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"What d'ye mean?" asked Kansas. "What hurts? Here, Mucker, show us that hand."

Mucker whimpered and drew back protestingly, but Kansas, speaking soothingly as to a child, drew the hand into view and held it while Ross made an examination, painful to Mucker and embarrassing to Ross, who felt keenly the uneasy distrust in Kansas Brown's manner.

Of course by this time, Ross thought, the other had heard of the fact that the elder Grant was interested in Seven, therefore, the younger must necessarily belong in the enemy's camp. Ross opened his mouth once to tell Kansas that he was neutral in the matter, but Kansas spoke just then.

"Huh!" Kansas ejaculated with gruff sympathy. "I didn't know his hand was in that shape. Guess he didn't tell me fer fear I'd send 'im back t' Gales Ridge—t' his father——" the speaker came to an abrupt stop, and glanced sharply at Ross.

"While I don't usually like to have people hurt," said the latter instantly, meeting Kansas' eyes frankly, "I must say that it isn't altogether a bad thing that Wort's nose is plastered to his face."

An expression of surprise flashed over Kansas' face. He made no reply, nor did Ross pursue the subject, but the atmosphere of distrust seemed suddenly to lift.

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"This is a fester and a half!" exclaimed Ross, intent on the hand. "Guess there's a sliver at the bottom of it, driven deep into the palm. Let's wash that hand clean, Mucker, and I can get the sliver out in a hurry, before we attend to Rodrigo here. Does it hurt badly?"

The boy cringed again. "Awful."

"Well," said Ross frankly, "when I go after the sliver it's going to hurt worse, but when I get it fixed up it will be a new hand. Will you let me work at it?"

The tears ran over the boy's cheeks. He looked from Kansas to Ross. "I don't want to be hurt worse," he whimpered.

"That will last only a few minutes," Ross assured him, "and then I'll—I'll feed you candy for a week," he added in a burst of inspiration.

That won Mucker's confidence. He consented to the "worse" hurt, bore it with the fear and fuss of a child, and, after the hand was dressed and bandaged, recovered as quickly and with the tears dried on his cheeks began munching lemon drops while he followed Ross about as the latter gave his attention to Rodrigo.

It was an uneasy attention. With Kansas' help he dressed the arm. There he felt sure of himself. But when with Kansas as imperfect interpreter he asked the sick man a few questions about himself,

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he knew he was traveling unfamiliar ground. He knew also that Dr. Scudder ought to be in camp, where he was paid for staying. He took Rodrigo's temperature and then stood looking down at him thinking, his fingers on the sick man's racing pulse.

"Mr. Brown," said Ross finally, frankly, "I wish we could get hold of Dr. Scudder. This man ought to have him. I'm not much in a case like this, only as a regular physician tells me what to do—and that's what I came to camp for—to work under Dr. Scudder, not without him. We ought to have him here now. This is a pretty bad case of fever."

Kansas twitched one shoulder and snapped his thumb and finger together. "Wall, Doc, wishes won't fetch 'im, and if they would Rod 'ud still be better off in your hands right now."

Six hours ago this speech would have astonished Ross, but the sight of the broken needle was sufficient explanation. He returned no comment, but looked at Rodrigo again, his forehead tied into a worried knot.

"Let's see," he said after a pause, speaking more to himself than to Kansas, "what did uncle give that miner in Dorranceton that had a—— Oh, yes!" His forehead unknotted itself, and his chin shot out. He straightened himself and spoke directly to Kansas. "I'll do my best with him. I'll

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go back and get some aconite tablets. I'm sure I saw some to-day in the medicine cupboard. I think they'll help—at least," candidly, "if it doesn't help it won't hurt—and then I'll come back and stay with him to-night. I may not be giving him the best medicine he could have, but I know how to nurse him—that much I got from my uncle, and that's a lot, care is."

Kansas looked down at the Mexican without replying for a moment. Then he looked up at Rodrigo. His voice held a note of gratitude, while the last vestige of distrust was stripped from his manner.

"I'd take it in good part, Doc, to have ye stay——" he hesitated and looked at the boy searchingly. "Are ye sure ye want to?"

Ross returned his gaze wonderingly. For a moment the feud between the camps had passed out of his mind. "Want to?" he repeated. "Why—yes, of course. I want to do everything that I'm able to do to save Rodrigo. I've got to go back to get the aconite, but before I go I'll fix him up with some ice on his head—— Can you get me some ice?"

"There's never a lack of ice on Dundee," Kansas replied. "How d'ye want it, hacked up small?"

Ross nodded. He was scanning the clothing hanging over the bunks. "What we need," he

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said, "is an ice cap, but we haven't one, and the next best thing is—some of you must have oilskin caps, if your tunnel drips as much water as all the rest of the tunnels do."

"I see," returned Kansas quickly. "You want somethin' that'll hold ice without meltin' an' wet-tin' everything around. Here's my cap."

The man turned to his own bunk, swept some clothing off the pegs over it, picked a "sou'wester" from among the tangle, and handed it to Ross. "Turned upside down, full of ice, with Mucker here to see that it don't spill over—— Say, Doc, that's an idee and a half!"

The eyes of the two met in a flash of good will, and then Kansas started for the door, slowly followed by Mucker.

"The ice will be here in ten minutes," he called over his shoulder. At the door of the bunk house he paused long enough to add, "I'll go back t' th' office with ye, Doc. It's almighty dark fer a stranger t' foller such a tricky trail as Dundee alone."

Ross's hands crumpled the yellow oilskin cap. He spoke vehemently. "No, no! I know the way—I've been over that trail before—last year. I shall go alone. It won't take me long."

"When ye git ready to go," said Kansas with finality, "I'll be right along with ye."

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He left Ross clutching the sou'wester in helpless alarm. What should he do? How should he prevent Kansas from passing that cabin at the entrance to the ledge? If he told the man of his fears he felt sure he would go anyway, for Kansas bore none of the hall-marks of the coward. In this case Ross would be precipitating the very fight he had schemed to avoid. No, he could not allow the other to walk into the trap unwarned, neither could he tell him of the trap. Then how manage the matter?

The assistant surgeon had not answered the question when Kansas and Mucker returned with a pailful of ice. Mechanically, clutching wildly at some plan that should relieve the situation, Ross filled the water-proof hat with ice and setting it on the sick man's head stood holding it while Kansas waited to accompany him back to the office. The boy could see no way out of the dilemma when Kansas himself opened the way by commanding Mucker to run over to the eating shack and eat his supper.

"Haven't you had yours?" asked Ross, catching at a respite. Then in response to a shake of Kansas' head he added eagerly, "Go on and eat. I'd like to stay here a while and see the effect of this on Rodrigo—see if it reduces his temperature."

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It was a reasonable proposition, and Kansas assented at once. As soon as he and Mucker had disappeared inside the mess cabin, Ross left his patient abruptly and ran swiftly and as silently as he was able past the other shacks, down the trail and around the end of the ridge. He was in search of Dad. Dad might be the natural enemy of Kansas, but he was square, and he was as anxious as Ross to avoid a rupture in camp. He could tell Dad his fears without increasing the difficulty, because it was Dad's partisans who were collected in Wort's cabin—provided they had not become tired of waiting.

His breath came in gasps as he stumbled and clawed his way up over the dump of Seven. It was too dark for him to see the trail which wound around the dump, and he was too excited to do any calm searching. As luck would have it, when he reached the summit he ran on Dad himself coming out of the mouth of the tunnel, where he had been giving directions to the night shift.

"Hello, Doc!" Dad exclaimed in amazement. "What's brought ye here this time in the evenin'?"

In reply, Ross laid hold of Dad's arm with fingers that gripped. "Dad, I haven't time to tell you—I've got to get back to Eight before Kansas gets through eating. Can't you walk with me

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down to the corner of the ridge while I explain?"

Dad raised the miner's candle that he held lighted in his hand and by its flickering rays looked at Ross. Then, blowing out the candle, he loosened the boy's unconscious grip on his arm and laying a calming hand on his shoulder, led him down around the dump by an easy path.

"Now, out with it, Doc!" was all he said.

The explanation came out swiftly and somewhat incoherently, but Dad could easily supply all missing links. "It may be," Ross ended, "that I'm more scared than I need be."

"Nope," returned Dad anxiously. "It means mischief with Boots in it. His claim is right down below us here. He's in this matter up t' his ears. And to-day ——" Dad paused and then went on: "Ye see, the Mucker is scared of his father when he's drunk and runs up here to Kansas. This afternoon Wort come after 'im—and Kansas give 'im the rough aidge of his fist. I don't doubt Wort needed it, but right now it wa'n't the thing t' do—I don't love Kansas none, but I don't want th' camps in a fight—and," with decision, "my side ain't goin' t' start no ruction while I'm able t' be travelin' these trails. I'll say fer Kansas," with visible reluctance, "that he's white to Mucker, and the boy needs a little white treat-

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ment. Once when he was little, Wort hit 'im on the head, and he's never fergot it, and so now he's afraid ——"

"But," interrupted Ross in an agony of apprehension, as they reached the end of the ledge, "what shall I do—and you—and Kansas ——"

"Go right along quiet like," said Dad stopping, "and jest do as Kansas says. Let 'im go with ye t' git yer stuff and I'll 'tend t' the rest. That'll be easy as snuff! Go long and jest stop actin'—well, jumpy like."

Ross did as he was bid without further parley. He had put the case in good hands, he believed, although he had no idea what Dad intended to do. He hurried up the side of the dump of Number Eight and entered the bunk house in time to find the ice cap upset and the water running about the Mexican's shivering shoulders. Hurriedly he repaired the mischief, and was holding the cap into place again when Kansas entered, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand, Mucker at his heels.

"Now, Mucker," said Kansas, "come here and do jest as Doc tells ye. We're goin' away fer an hour, but no one 'll git ye, Mucker. The day shift is comin' here t' sleep now, and you'll be as safe as if I was here."

Whenever he spoke to the boy the man's voice took on the peculiarly kind tone in which we

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speaking to a sick baby. He drew him forward gently, and Ross with awkward kindness sought to allay his fear and show him how to hold the cap, empty out the melted ice and refill it.

Finally having persuaded the boy to stay at his post, Kansas and Ross retraced their steps toward Gales Ridge, the latter in an agony of apprehension over Dad's movements. They passed the dump of Seven in silence. No one was in sight, nor did they see any one as they made their way down the cañon and up the side of Gales Ridge. Apprehensively Ross strained his eyes toward the cabin beneath the pines. It was still dark and silent. Not so the office, however. It was lighted and inhabited, and as the two passed Wort's cabin, Ross saw the office door was wide open, and his apprehensions transferred themselves to the doctor's shack.

He led the way across the ledge on knees that trembled. Unconsciously he kept clearing his throat. As he approached the open doorway he essayed a whistle, but it died into a croak as he recognized Boots and Harve in the group seated around the heater. He entered on feet that almost refused to bear him forward. Then, all at once, inside the door, fear gave way to relief. He drew a long breath and with a brief nod in the direction of the stove, made his way across the

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room to the medicine cupboard, followed by Kansas. With cold fingers he selected what he needed and then stepping to the door of the kitchen raised his voice at the deaf and dumb man washing dishes.

"I won't be here to-night, Hank," he yelled. "I'm going to take care of Rodrigo. He's worse!"

Hank scowled at him and began making rapid passes with his fingers.

"Here," said Kansas, "I'll tell 'im," and his fingers also began to move.

Ross stepped back to the cupboard. His explanation had been intended for the silent group about the stove, and not for the deaf-mute.

"Chilly out to-night," remarked Ross cheerfully as he pushed the bottles about in the cupboard.

"Yeh," responded Boots.

"It takes some exercise just to keep me warm inside of a sweater," Ross proceeded yet more cheerfully. "A fur-lined overcoat would be more to the point."

"Yeh," Boots responded.

The group did not seem disposed to engage in conversation.

When Kansas came back from the kitchen Ross asked, "All ready?" and the two left the office, Ross calling a civil "good-night" over his shoulder.

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"Good-night," came an unwilling chorus.

Ross smiled into the darkness, for leaning against the door-jamb—his hands deep in his pockets, his cap shoved to the back of his head—stood Dad, his chest rising and falling in deep breaths caused by the rapidity of his entrance into the scenes—and plans—on Gales Ridge.

CHAPTER VII

THE TRAP

SILENTLY Ross and Kansas swung down the side of Gales Ridge, the older man leading, the younger rejoicing over Dad and the effective aid he had rendered "easy as snuff!" The boy readily saw that the mere appearance, unexpected as it was, of the powerful deputy sheriff among the men who, though his professed adherents, yet were opposed to his peace policy, would effectually block their hastily formed plot against Kansas.

As the two reached the cañon the creak of a heavily laden wagon reached them and the crack of a "black snake."

Kansas paused, muttering, "Wonder if that freighter's fer me?"

Ross, asking no questions, stopped also and presently a freighter's long outfit came crawling into view in the moonlight, three spans of bronchos guided by a single "hitch rein" and a long writhing "black snake," in the hands of a noisy driver who walked beside the reluctant horses. The wagon, a heavy affair, was covered by a

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tarpaulin and packed solidly. Ross wondered at the apparent weight of the load, which was only as high as the wagon box.

As soon as Kansas saw the driver he whirled about abruptly and continued on his way up the cañon.

"Then it's not for you?" Ross asked, following.

Before Kansas could reply the driver had halted him with a shouted:

"Hey, thar, whoever ye be!"

Kansas paused. "Well?"

"Is Dad Page up t' the office, d'ye know?"

"Yes," returned Kansas shortly, "he is."

Behind them the freighter raised a stentorian voice. "Page! Hey, there, Dad P-a-g-e! Come along down here! I've got yer sticks!"

"Dynamite, isn't it?" asked Ross as the two went on. "Dynamite for Number Seven?"

"Guess so," Kansas returned. "I didn't know when I heard th' wagon but it was sticks fer me."

As they turned into the Dundee trail, Ross ventured on another question. "How do you—and Dad—get sticks up here?"

"Back-pack 'em up," said Kansas, jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "The wagon will stop at the foot of this trail and all hands in Seven'll turn out to-morrer or to-night and pack 'em up t' th' powder house on their shoulders."

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Ross stopped, panting with the climb, and leaned against a rock. "Don't see how they can!" he gasped. "It's all I can do to carry my shoulders up here, to say nothing of a box of dynamite added!"

Kansas stopped beside him, smiling, and when Kansas smiled his lean face lighted up attractively.

"Ye'll git used to it in time, Doc, and think nothin' of th' climb. It's the thin air up here next th' sky!"

"I got so I could get around rather well last year when I was here," Ross returned, "although the worst trails got me up to the last. Always had to stop and blow more or less."

There followed a moment's silence and then Ross exclaimed, "Whew! What moonlight! The thin air certainly clears out the sunlight and moonlight. We never see such a dazzle in Pennsylvania."

"D'ye like it?" asked Kansas softly.

Ross hesitated. "Yes, of course I like it," he said honestly, "but I'd like it better if I had it back in Pennsylvania. These mountains seem to me always sort of hanging over my head ready to tumble down on me. Still—a night like this—well, it can't be beat, that's all! I'd like to stay outdoors all night."

Kansas nodded. "That's me too," he declared

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warmly. "What I like on such a night is a blanket wrapped around me 'n' my saddle fer a piller 'n' my horse munchin' near by 'n' the smell of fire in my nose—a fire in the open. 'N' nothin' twixt me 'n' th' stars exceptin' only this good thin air! That's livin'."

He sniffed it in deep content, leaning against the rock near Ross.

"Yes," assented Ross slowly, "that's living—to you. But it's queer about—well, about living. I presume when you think of what you'd like best to do that comes into your mind, doesn't it? You can see what you've just said, can't you?"

"That's the idee," quietly.

"Now when I think of living—of what I'd like best to do I can see things so different."

Kansas turned toward him expectantly, and when Ross didn't go on he prompted, "Well?"

"Maybe," began Ross diffidently, "you never saw the inside of an operating room?"

"Nope."

"Well, when I think of myself doing the thing I like best I always see myself togged out in white like a mummy," with an embarrassed laugh, "and doing a difficult operation better than any one else could. That, to me, is living."

"In a shut up room in a city!" added Kansas in a tone of unconscious disgust.

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Ross chuckled. "Yes, and the air isn't thin, and the odors aren't like the smoke of a fire in the open—not much! They're a bit thicker—but," here he squared his broad shoulders, "that's what I'm going to do—and do it right, too!"

"I believe," said Kansas slowly, "that if I had t' be hacked up I'd like ye t' git int' yer white clothes and do th' job. Seems t' me ye'd do it with every ounce in ye!"

With this the speaker started rapidly up the trail leaving Ross to follow with a glow about his heart at the tribute from Dad's rival.

When the two arrived at the bunk house of Eight they were met by Mucker who besieged Ross for the promised candy.

"Got all I gave you eaten?"

"Yes; hain't you brought me more?" asked Mucker, his lip beginning to quiver.

"You shall have candy," Ross promised, "tomorrow when I can go up to the store after it. I couldn't go to-night. I hadn't time."

There was only one store in Miners' Camp, and that was at the upper "diggin's."

Mucker, comforted, divided his attention between Kansas and Ross until it was time for him to turn in. He babbled continually of the candy and Ross told him patiently over and over again that he should have lemon drops and sticks, pink

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and white striped sticks, and chocolate drops, anything the upper camp afforded, and the probabilities were it would afford much in the line of sweets, as the miners were notorious consumers of candy.

At Ross's suggestion, the sick man was moved into the bunk nearest the door where his nurse could pass in and out of the bunk house without disturbing the day shift of Mexicans, who were already rolling themselves in their blankets in the bunks. The two Browns were the only Americans at work in Eight. Kansas filled the heater with wood, closed the drafts and then going outside sat smoking in the moonlight. Jean Brown was in the tunnel with the night shift.

Presently Kansas was joined by a couple of men from the upper camp. Ross, sitting on the foot of his patient's bunk, could both hear and see them. Mucker, finding the group more interesting than the silent bunk house, went out and sat down behind Kansas. The men smoked and talked in a desultory fashion. They spoke of the work in the upper camp; of the valley news brought by Bill Travers; of the Fourth of July and the fact that no plans for a joint celebration had been made by the camps. It appeared they had celebrated together the previous year. These references caused Ross to strain his ears, but

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Kansas at once changed the subject by asking if his callers had "run acrost th' freight outfit at th' foot of th' Dundee trail?"

They had, and already the men of Seven were back-packing the stuff up to Seven. This led to a discussion of Seven which held no interest to Ross, as Kansas had evidently managed to inform them of his presence in the bunk house. Therefore, the discussion was purely impersonal and centered around the question of the position of Dad's powder house.

"Tell ye what," said one of the men, "I sh'd hate t' work in Seven with the powder shack right in the midst of things. Say! If that powder sh'd make a mistake an' go off some day it 'ud blow the bunk house 'n' the eatin' shack and th'——"

The second stranger interrupted this with, "Well, t' make a long story short, it 'ud blow the hull of Seven t' Kingdom Come—all, that is, that's above ground."

"And some that's under ground," added the first speaker; "it 'ud knock the mouth of the tunnel high and crazy."

A lively argument was soon in progress, Kansas having taken the position that such an explosion would expend its force on the ledge against which the shack was built and not reach the mouth of the tunnel or the bunk house. The two strangers

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assailed this idea in voices which arose with each additional argument.

"Ye can't tell me!" exclaimed one of them. "If I should touch a match to a single stick in that powder shack, Seven 'ud be wiped clean off th' face o' this little hill!"

Rodrigo, aroused by the loud, excited voices, began tossing about restlessly and talking disjointedly. Ross filled the sou'wester with ice and laid it on the sick man's head, and then called Kansas in to interpret what he said, and the two strangers tramped away. The sick man was delirious, but silence and good care soon put him again to sleep, while Kansas and the Mucker occupied the bunk next his.

All night Ross attended Rodrigo faithfully, but there were intervals when he was free to go outside and sit huddled in his top coat and sweater away from the heat of the bunk house. Far below him, as he sat on a rock that raised its head above the dump, was the black cavern of the cañon. On the other side of this cavern, but still below him, were the lights at the entrance of the Gales Ridge tunnel. Ahead and very near rose the jagged towering dividing ridge between Seven and Eight. Above his head the summit of Dundee cut the sky. By four o'clock, just as the tunnel's lights were dimmed by the approaching dawn, there was

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a muffled roar which made the mountain tremble. It was from Seven.

"Another shot put," thought Ross as he aroused himself from his cramped position on the rock and stepped inside the bunk house.

Rodrigo was sleeping quietly. His face was cool and damp. Ross removed the ice cap, his thoughts lingering with Dad and Dundee Seven.

Another explosion, nearer and more violent, shook the bunk house. It was the result of a "shot" in Eight. "The two claims are going it together, neck and heels," he thought. "I wonder which will reach the intersection first. Of course I hope Dad ——"

Here he hesitated and looked behind him. In the bunk next to Rodrigo's lay Kansas Brown, wrapped in a blanket, his head pillowed on a muscular arm, his lean, clear-cut face upturned and his thick brown hair tousled. Although the bunk was built to hold only one occupant comfortably, Mucker lay behind him, his head buried confidently under Kansas' arm. He lay so quietly that Ross thought he was asleep until a grin spread over the vacant face and the boy's eyes opened widely, watching the embryo surgeon without fear. He had evidently decided that Doc Tenderfoot would not "git" him.

Ross, responding to the grin, went back to his

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rock and sat staring down into the cañon, gray now amid its trees while the snowy peaks were aglow with the pink of the sunrise.

"I like Kansas," Ross muttered, "and I like Dad, but both of 'em can't come out ahead—wish they could!"

Then his conscience smote him for such wavering allegiance when he thought of Dad, fine old Dad, glued to the door-jamb the previous night, a wordless but effective check on the hot-headed company beside the stove. Ross wondered whether he had found them in Wort's shack or in the office.

At this point his thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of Kansas Brown's brother Jean, Ross's companion on the stage three days before. He burst out of the mouth of the tunnel on a run, with his face glowing excitedly. Seeing Ross sitting on the rock, he checked his speed abruptly, and passed his hand over his face as though to wipe out all signs of the emotion which obsessed him.

"Good-morning," he said, stopping beside the rock; "how's Rod this morning?"

"Better," said Ross. "His fever's gone."

Brown hesitated, glanced toward the bunk house and then back at the tunnel just as two Mexican laborers appeared peering out of its

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mouth jabbering excitedly. As soon as they saw the head of the night shift they jumped back, not waiting to see the quick sweep of his arm commanding a retreat.

"Takes a dozen Americans to keep a dozen Greasers to work!" exclaimed Brown, looking uneasily at Ross. Then he asked abruptly, "Do you understand their lingo?"

"Not one word of it," answered Ross readily.

The other appeared relieved. "I've been around 'em so much down in Arizona that I've picked up enough to ——"

Here his voice died away. He was evidently not thinking of what he was saying. Looking back at the mouth of the tunnel, he went on into the bunk house.

Ross waited in lively curiosity. It was evident that something unusual had happened. In a few moments the older brother appeared accompanied by Kansas, the latter's hair still tousled, and his face yet drawn with sleep. The brother went directly to the tunnel, but Kansas paused beside Ross for a moment's discussion of Rodrigo.

"I'll come back to see him this afternoon," said Ross, "but now I ought to get back to the office as soon as I can." He hesitated and then added, "You know there's Wort—I've got to look out for his nose."

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"I s'pose ye have," returned Kansas. He ran his fingers through his hair and scowled, adding, "Of course ye must. That's yer business, no matter on what sort of a feller the nose is—I'll be back in a few minutes so ye kin go."

Ross waited for his return, wondering what had happened. It could not have been an accident as no one was carried out injured. The only other happening that he could think of as likely to cause such suppressed excitement and secrecy was the discovery of ore bearing high values in gold. Probably, he concluded, the shift had come on a pocket of good ore, perhaps—here his excitement mounted—perhaps at the intersection of the veins. That last shot might have driven the tunnel into the intersection. Perhaps they had gone faster than Dad supposed.

He watched the mouth of the tunnel eagerly, but when Kansas at last appeared it was with no word of information. His manner merely seemed constrained, and he appeared relieved when Ross declared that he must not stay to breakfast but get back to the office at once. He asked particularly at what hour that afternoon "Doc" would visit Rodrigo and then accompanied him not only to the ledge but on to the dump of Seven, preceding him wordlessly and abstractedly. When, at last, he stopped and turned to Ross, his abstraction fell



“ I TAKE IT IN MIGHTY GOOD PART ”

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from him a moment and he held out his hand with a diffident cordiality :

"Doc, as I told ye before, I take it in mighty good part what ye've done fer Rod."

Then with his hands thrust into his pockets he stood quietly and watched the boy out of sight.

Ross, glancing over his shoulder, followed the trail slowly. It had been his intention to stop at Seven and interview Dad, but there was something in Kansas' manner and watchfulness that pushed him along past Seven. It was evident that the owner of Eight was standing there to assure himself that the boy was sincere in his declaration that he must be back at the office before breakfast.

The idea also occurred to Ross that if he called on Dad Kansas might suspect him of reporting the excitement which had followed the explosion in Eight. There was something mysterious in that excitement and in the agitation it had created in Kansas, followed by his deep thoughtfulness. As Ross made his way carefully down the treacherous trail his imagination was circling in such a lively fashion around the mysterious movements of the Brown brothers that he forgot the part he himself had played the previous evening in another mysterious movement. He was reminded only when he was climbing the side of Gales Ridge facing the little cabin among the pines. Then the fact was

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borne in on him that on Gales Ridge he was in the midst of a camp hostile to Kansas Brown, and if the camp suspected that he, Ross, had circumvented its designs —

“Well,” Ross shivered as he entered the office, “they’ve got it in their power to make it too hot for me here—here where I am not to take sides!”

Then his glance fell on the door-jamb that had supported the silent but powerful deputy sheriff the previous evening, and a wave of relief passed over him. Dad was his friend, and Dad’s word went with the Gales Ridge men. Besides, when he came to look the situation squarely in the face, the fact that his father was one of the owners of Seven, while it had little weight with him, would naturally make the men of Gales Ridge think that he opposed Kansas and favored Dad.

He stepped inside the door just as a man whom he had never seen came hurriedly around the corner of the stack of post-office boxes after seeming to rise from the floor.

Ross was too startled to notice the confusion of the other, while the stranger was too confused to see the start he had given the younger man. For an instant they faced each other in silence. The stranger was the first to recover.

“I thought I see a paper in my box,” he mum-

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bled, "and as there wasn't anybody here t' git it fer me I went 'round after it myself."

"Well—did—did you get it?"

The other nodded and, brushing past the questioner, left the shack. As he disappeared among the pines, Ross, who had followed him to the door, noticed that he carried no paper in his hand, nor was it bulging from the pockets of his closely fitting sweater. The boy went into the post-office corner and looked about. There had been only a couple of letters and a few papers left in the office the night before, and they were still there. He pulled at the drawer, but it was securely locked.

"The fellow was down here under the shelf," he thought, stooping.

Instantly he saw the reason for the other's position in the shape of the last page of his letter to his father exhibiting on its face the information that he was bent on getting Razorback Jones into camp! The letter had been written on the leaves of a tablet, and the wind from the open half sash behind the stack had evidently deposited the top page on the floor while he was talking to Harve about Wort's nose. Ross picked up the truant page and looked at it ruefully. If the stranger had read it, and of course he had, it would strengthen the conviction in camp that "Doc Tenderfoot" was indeed a partisan of Dad. He

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had been in Miners' just forty-eight hours, and had unintentionally "taken sides," the very thing which both Dad and the doctor had advised him not to do! Still—and the relief of this fact more than overbalanced any apprehension he felt on the score of being considered partisan—he had conveyed the impression of partisanship through neither carelessness nor forgetfulness. His speech in the Weller House had been the natural outcome of his ignorance, while this letter business was an accident for which not even his father could hold him accountable.

"The affair can't hurt anybody except myself," he concluded. "And I can't see how it'll hurt me much except to get me disliked by the upper camp. Then," he added grimly after a moment's thought, "if the fellows down here in this camp find out that I interfered last night with their plans they'll be down on me too and"—in a sudden burst of recollection—"to-morrow's the Fourth, when a chap may need all the friends he can get in case of a row."

The thought of the Fourth brought him to Sims' promise that the doctor should return before the Fourth, and to-day was the third. He might come on the stage. Bill Travers was due with the mail that night. Ross felt that the heavy although vague load of responsibility would be lifted from

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his shoulders by the doctor's appearance. He had noticed that never once had the men, even Bill Travers, referred to his chief as "Doc" or "Scudder" or in any other terms approaching familiarity, and the fact had impressed him. It was an indication of the impression which the physician's personality had made on them—they might know too much about him to respect him, but they certainly stood in some awe of him.

"Even if he doesn't come back in a state to assume responsibility," thought Ross, glancing back at the locked door, "just to have him in there behind lock and key would give me more nerve."

He built a fire in the heater, and going to the kitchen door nodded at Hank, who had just begun to make a move toward breakfast. He was turning back into the office again when he heard voices outside and Boots entered with Harve, and between them a sobered, weak, pain-chastened Wort.

"Mornin', Doc," said Boots with a geniality that caused Ross to breathe more freely. "We wa'n't sure ye'd be here."

"Just got back," Ross answered. "I came in time for breakfast," he added as Hank came to the office door to see why his summons was not obeyed. "I was going up to the bunk house to see Wort afterward. That's why I came early."

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"Uh-huh," smiled Boots. Then, carelessly, "Leave the Greaser some better?"

Ross sat down astride the bench beside Wort and examined the nose. "Much better," he responded.

"That's good news." Boots came behind Wort and held his head steady. He seemed to anticipate the boy's movements, making a valuable assistant. Harve stood by looking on silently.

Suddenly Boots asked with disconcerting unexpectedness, "How'd ye come t' hear Rod was too bad off t' hike over here last night?"

The question took Ross completely by surprise. He glanced up into Boots' shrewd eyes, flushing and stammering. He told the truth, but his confusion did not indicate it. "I met Kansas down in the cañon and he told me—he was on his way up here to get me—or Dr. Scudder, rather. He didn't know I was alone."

Harve gave a sarcastic grunt and blurted out, "I seen ye go up Gales Ridge, not down. How'd ye git t' th' cañon?"

Luckily Ross had regained possession of himself once more. "You saw me!" he exclaimed. "I didn't meet a soul. Where were you?"

Boots laughed outright at this turn of the tables, a pleasing, amused laugh, and came to the rescue of the slower witted man. "Harve was makin'

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po'try in the moonlight. He's always moonin' 'round on bright nights. Come, Wort, ye're all right—git up, man !”

As the trio arose to go Ross saw Boots nudge Wort. The latter turned and steadied himself against the back of the bench. He spoke unwillingly, such patches on his face as were exposed to view reddening. The sobered Wort was very different from the weeping, groveling, drunken Wort.

“Doc, did ye see my—my boy up at Kansas’?”

“Yes,” returned Ross briefly.

“When's Kansas goin' t' send 'im back?” pursued Boots.

Ross made no reply. He turned to the medicine chest and began rearranging the bottles industriously. He saw that his movements of the previous night were suspected, and he wondered if Dad's were also. It would not increase Dad's influence with the men if they thought he had listened to an appeal to thwart their plans.

Boots raised his voice under the impression that Ross had not heard and repeated the question.

“I don't know,” returned Ross shortly. Then he waited. So did the three.

“What—what did Kansas say?” insisted Wort.

“He said,” returned Ross instantly, “that the moonlight last night couldn't be beaten! Or was it I who said that—I've forgotten which it was!”

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This bit of pleasantry was lost on the boy's audience. He did not look around to see how it was taken, but he could feel the irritation.

"Ye know what Wort means!" exclaimed Boots angrily. "We want t' know what he said about Mucker—when's he goin' t' send 'im home?"

"I know nothing more about it than you do!" returned Ross with a snap in his own voice.

"'N' what ye don't want t' know ye can't find out, of course," added Boots quickly, in a voice so disagreeable that Ross's temper overcame his fear.

He whirled about exclaiming, "Well, if you're asking me what I do know about the matter I can tell you that Mucker has a right to stay where he isn't afraid of another blow from a brute of a father! And now if you'd like to get any more of my opinion on the matter ask some more questions!"

Ross was larger physically than any one of the three, and with his eyes ablaze wrathfully and his manner an unconscious menace, he made rather an impressive Nemesis. Wort, with the visible patches of his face scarlet, guiltily stumbled out of the door, followed by Harve and Boots, who seemed overwhelmed with astonishment at the change from awkward, diffident boyhood to menacing manhood.

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Instead of following the trio to the door, Ross went into the post-office corner and stood beneath the open window to "cool down." As his callers rounded the corner of the shack and came under the window Harve was mumbling something, the last words of which Ross caught:

"—— father's in Seven. I jest can't make 'im out!"

Boots chuckled grimly. "Wall, I guess he suspicioned us last night, all right, and got ahead of us. But we'll see who comes out ahead this evening. If he's fer Kansas, he'll be some taken down when he finds out that he's been used as a packhoss in spite of himself—'n' some spunky, too, jedgin' from how he's jest acted!"

Ross strained his ears to hear more, but the voices were so low that he failed. He understood perfectly the reference to his father's ownership and the effect that the men thought it ought to have on the son, but the rest of Boots' speech both puzzled and alarmed him. In what way was his partisanship to be tested? How was he to be used as a packhorse?

He spent a restless morning, in anticipation of some further move on the part of Boots. He wrote a half hearted letter of inquiry concerning Razor-back Jones, directed it to the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, nor did he forget to put it

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into his pocket with the other letter. Dinner time came and nothing had happened. Ross's spirits arose as he sat down to an appetizing dinner. He could not help being gratified by Boots' attitude and the fact that the men considered some maneuvering necessary both to outwit and to test him. It gave him some of the self-confidence he needed.

He had nearly finished his dinner when the expected happened in so unexpected a manner that he was for a few moments thrown off his guard. Boots entered the office nimbly and, passing directly into the kitchen, called cheerfully and carelessly :

"Hello, Doc! Here's a letter to Kansas Brown that the foreman wanted me t' ask ye t' take over. I told 'im ye aimed t' go this afternoon." Then raising his voice he yelled at the deaf-mute, "Hey, there, Hank!"

Hank, knowing he was being greeted, nodded and grinned.

Ross picked up the envelope. It was long and yellow and directed in a sprawling hand and sealed. "Do you mean the foreman of the Gales Ridge tunnel sends it?" he asked, putting it into his breast pocket.

"He's the feller! and he hopes ye remembers easier than ye fergits!"

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"All right," Ross responded emphatically. "I can tell you right now I'll not forget!"

Boots, not understanding the vehemence of the assertion containing that word "forget," looked long and keenly at the boy, but Ross's handling of the letter was so unsuspecting, his very vehemence so hearty and open that the other nodded to himself and lingered no longer. He left the kitchen whistling and retraced his steps up the Gales Ridge trail.

Not until he had left the table and was getting ready to visit Rodrigo did it occur to Ross that this letter represented the fulfilment of the low conversation between Boots and Harve. He drew the envelope out and looked at it, and the long yellow surface connected itself more and more firmly with Boots' speech beneath the window. There was mischief in that letter, he felt certain, and he was to be made the bearer of it to Kansas, and by this means in some way his sympathies were to become known to the camp. What was inside?

"It's no more from the foreman than from me," he muttered aloud with growing conviction. He held it up to the light, but could see not one word of the contents.

Sitting down behind the post-office boxes he rested his elbows on the shelf and took his head

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in his hands. Fifteen minutes later he opened the drawer beneath the shelf and took out a pearl handled paper knife belonging to the doctor. "I've never done such a thing before," he muttered between his teeth, "and I hate to now like a dog, but if I've got to be a 'packhorse' it's up to me to see what I'm packing when the camp's in such a state as this!"

He worked slowly and carefully at the flap of the envelope until it yielded to his efforts without a break. He found also enough mucilage untouched by Boots' hasty tongue to re-seal it well.

The contents consisted of a single sheet signed by a dozen of the Gales Ridge men. These signatures followed a demand on Kansas to send Mucker back with Doc. "Or," the message ended, "we will go over and take 'im, and no fooling this time!"

Fearful lest some one might come in and find him engaged in his unlawful but excusable occupation, the boy re-sealed the letter with painstaking exactness, pressing it under one of his medical books until the flap was firmly sealed. The result was satisfactory, but not until the letter was again in his breast pocket did he fully follow the situation it had created into its bewildering mazes. That message was enough of a fuse to furnish fireworks for a dozen Fourths!

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Suppose he delivered the letter to Kansas. The temper and pride of the latter would not brook such a threatening demand. He would not allow the Mucker to go because such a compliance would be an admission of weakness and fear on his part. There would be nothing left for him to do but to defy the Gales Ridge men—and call on the willing upper camp for help. And Ross did not need to be told what this would mean with those twelve signatures attached to the demand. If, on the other hand, he should refuse now to take the message—and this brought him up against the personal side and Boots' speech—he would be obliged to admit that he had read it and the refusal would place him openly on the side of Kansas Brown. Besides, such a course would damage himself without in the least lessening the danger of the situation, as Boots would make a "packhoss" of some one else, and the letter would eventually reach Kansas.

Of course, from first to last his thoughts had turned to Dad, and the constant impulse was to take the demand to Number Seven and let the owner deal with the situation. But he had called on Dad only last evening, and Dad had responded effectively—too effectively to suit the Gales Ridge men. Was it fair to Dad to ask him again to stand against his own followers? How far would

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they allow him to stand? It might make him an endless amount of trouble, even to stopping the work in Seven.

Ross went to the door and looked up at Dundee, where the dazzling white of its snow-crowned heights met the dazzling blue of the sky. But the beauty of the scene held no appeal to him now.

"If only I could stand on my own feet in this matter," he thought longingly, "and find a way out myself, I wouldn't feel so like a fizzle here as I feel now."

He thrust his hands into his pockets, and explored them aimlessly. In a corner of one his fingers closed on a small hard object. He drew it out and, glancing at it without interest, tossed it over the ledge. Then suddenly the object and its connection with the problem he was trying to solve woke him up. The flash of an idea caused him to leap up and crack his heels together. Then he went inside the office and sat down, elbows on knees and head on palms, while the idea took possession of him. It grew moment by moment. It was feasible, practical. He saw that he had every tool at hand for carrying out a plan that eliminated Dad completely. There only remained the necessity that he be skilful in the use of the tools.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SEALED LETTER

IN the middle of the afternoon, Ross left the shack en route for Number Eight. As he passed Wort's cabin at the end of the ledge he saw it was inhabited. The door stood open, and Wort lay in his bunk opposite. Boots was moving about spryly frying bacon.

"'Lo, Doc!" he called, coming to the door. "Startin' fer Dundee, are ye?"

Ross stopped and looked into the miserable, dirty hut. "Just where I'm heading," he nodded with as much cheerfulness as he could muster.

"Got the foreman's letter, have ye?"

Ross whacked the breast of his sweater. "Right here it is."

Boots nodded. "We've got a foreman that's a red-headed caution," he chuckled. "Better remember t' hand that letter over t' Kansas 'r he'll land on ye with both feet!"

As Ross ran down the trail he threw over his shoulder a reply which surprised and pleased himself: "Well, if I do forget to hand it over now I

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promise you I'll make an extra trip with it so your 'red-headed caution' won't get a chance to land on me with one foot, even!"

He reached the stage trail smiling and hoping that this answer would prove to be an auspicious beginning to his plan. He turned and looked down the trail lingeringly, half hoping to see Sims' outfit with the doctor on the front seat returning as he had promised. But the trail was empty. He went on, telling himself that Scudder would surely come back with Bill Travers if Sims could not bring him. He tried to hold confidently to that idea, but hurried in order to get back to Gales Ridge before it was time for Bill to arrive. As assistant postmaster there were his mail duties that he must not forget. The word "forget" grated now on a sensitive nerve.

Instead of turning in at the Dundee trail, he continued up the cañon until he came to the store, the first building in the upper camp. He was so intent on his plans that he did not look up until a voice he had heard before halted him in the doorway. The owner of the voice sat in the sunshine on a section of log tilted against a stump a few feet from the shack.

"Howdy," said the voice. "First call on Miners' department store, eh?"

Ross turned with a start, and the second time

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that day faced the proprietor of the store, for this was the man who had so hastily retreated from the office that morning, MacFadden, the leader of the upper camp in the Dundee feud. The writer of the unfortunate letter felt an upward wave of dismay that flashed to the surface in a red, confused face. MacFadden, however, was neither red nor confused. He came forward nonchalantly, looking Ross over leisurely. Neither face nor manner expressed recognition, approval or disapproval. While Ross was standing speechless before the door he pushed past and entered with the careless invitation :

"Come in 'n' help yerself t' my stock. It might be better, 'n' then agin, it might be worser. See it 'n' jedge."

Ross recovered himself and followed, saying hastily, "I'm after candy."

"Uh-huh! Most of the boys up here are. I sell a heap of the stuff. The camp don't take a back seat when it comes t' candy. We don't pack many evenin' suits up here, but Omaha can't give ye no better candy. What kinds, now?"

Ross went inside the shack. He stepped over bags of meal, dodged hams swinging from the roof logs, crowded past piles of boxes of "canned goods," edged around heaps of sacks filled with flour, stumbled over bales of sweaters, slickers and

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corduroy suits, finally reaching the shelves where stood the rows of boxes, wooden and pasteboard, filled with candy.

As he made his selections he felt the merchant's eyes traveling over him with more curiosity than animosity. In fact the merchant's manner was so lazy and listless that Ross began to doubt that he had read the page on the floor. Probably, he decided, MacFadden was just stooping to examine it when he was interrupted.

"Ye must be Doc Tenderfoot?" remarked the merchant inquiringly, as he held out a jar of yellow stick candy.

Ross nodded, stowing his purchases away in his pockets.

"Thought so," said the man. "Kansas Brown said to-day you was in the lower camp. Said ye was up with the sick Greaser last night."

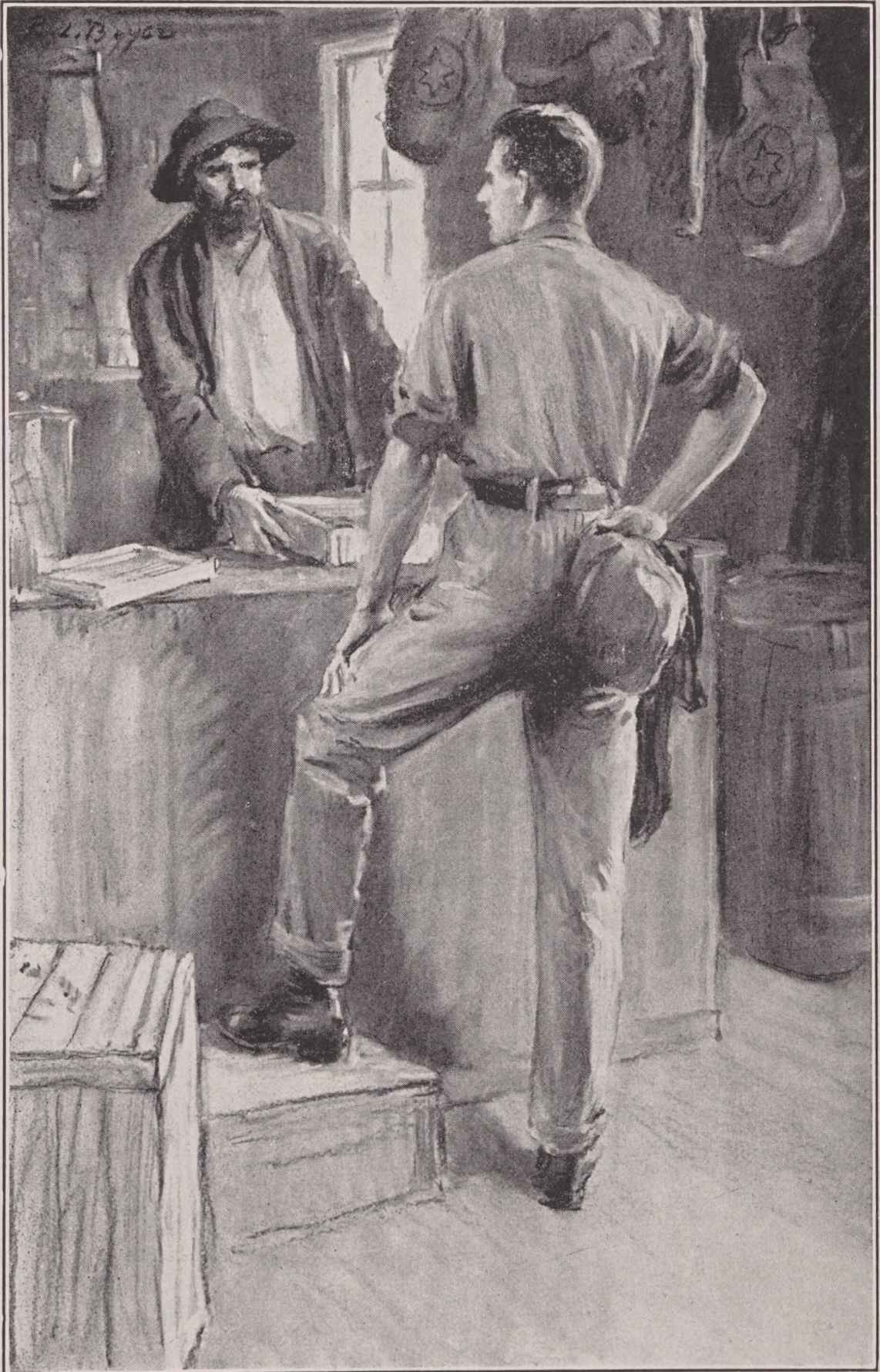
Again Ross nodded. "I'm helping Dr. Scudder."

"Where is he now?"

"He went down to the valley—but," Ross hastened to add this, "he is coming back to-night."

"Uh-huh." MacFadden uncovered a wooden box and held it out to Ross. "Old-fashioned lemon drops, these. Hard t' git hold of any these days."

Ross looked down on the same round sweet



“WHAT’S DOING UP HERE TO-MORROW?”



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drops with which he had fed Mucker the day before. He put his hand into the pocket from which he had drawn the one remaining candy—and an inspiration—a couple of hours ago, and said briefly:

“I’ll fill up this pocket with those—half a pound, say.”

“All right,” responded the merchant, adjusting his scales. Then, casually, “How’s th’ lower camp aimin’ t’ celebrate the Fourth?”

“I haven’t heard them say,” responded Ross retaliating with: “And this camp? What’s doing up here to-morrow?”

“Haven’t heard,” answered MacFadden, adding, “Better take a little of this stick candy,” tendering the box, but still studying the purchaser. “Your boys goin’ t’ stay in camp?”

“I don’t know,” reiterated Ross. “I haven’t heard any one say.”

“Uh-huh,” grunted the merchant.

His pockets bulging with sweets, Ross began to climb the Dundee trail, glad that the leader of the upper camp had not caught him napping in his replies. Then questioner and questions faded as the weight of responsibility for the scheme he had undertaken pressed down on him once more, reinforced by the acute interest taken in the Fourth by every one in camp—an idle Fourth evidently

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for both camps. The old adage occurred to him forcefully: "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do." A spasm of fear gripped his heart. If he should faint in the task he had set himself, he well knew that there were many hands that would find congenial occupation on the morrow.

"It won't do for me to fail!" he muttered determinedly. "I've got to buck up and go right through with it with a straight face."

He rounded a shoulder of the mountain and came on Dad Page standing with his back against a rock, his eyes shaded with one hand, gazing up the mountainside. This position commanded a view of the dump of Eight. He started when Ross appeared, and uttered a confused exclamation, which changed to a relieved welcome as soon as he recognized him.

"Doc," he said frankly, renewing his scrutiny, "I'm tryin' t' see through that dump 'n' int' th' tunnel of Eight! I'd mighty well like t' get in there 'n' see fer myself what's goin' on."

Ross scarcely heard the remark. The appearance of Dad just then brought back the temptation to throw the responsibility for the camps' peace again on his big shoulders. Impulsively the boy drew the letter half out of his pocket, hesitated and then asked abruptly:

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"Last night, Dad—how did you manage with the men?"

The older man, cupping his hand over his eyes, peered up at the dump intently while he made answer absently: "Oh, wall enough—fer that once. I went a-trampin' up the trail, and they thought, of course, it was Kansas. They come a-tumblin' out of Wort's cabin and had a little s'prise party when they seen it was me. Sight of me sort of confused 'em and took the fight out of 'em, I guess, but nobody did any explainin', and neither did I. We jest traded remarks on the weather and all went along t' the office. There they jest sot and I jest stood while you and Kansas come and went. Nothin' was said before ner after. That's all. But, Doc," here Dad turned to the boy soberly, "ye better not go fer t' git into such a fix again. Th' air was ruther thick 'n' tight 'round me all the while, so t' speak. I guess th' boys suspicioned both you and me. They wouldn't stand fer many such breaks."

Ross pushed the letter resolutely back into his pocket saying in a muffled tone, "Exactly what I thought."

Dad, unobservant of the tone and movement, returned again to his study of Eight. "Doc," he began, "this mornin' jest as the night shift was makin' ready t' leave Seven they heard a some-

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thing 'r other—that come from somewheres—they was too scared t' be sure about anything. They come tearin' out of the tunnel like all possessed. Said they thought they'd likely not git out. They was sure 'til they got out t' th' open that th' noise was our powder goin' off, with th' mouth of th' tunnel bein' blown int' flinders. They was so almighty astonished t' find themselves out-of-doors with everything jest as usual that they thought they was dreamin', but I don't believe they was."

"Why, Dad!" began Ross impulsively, "this morning, was it? Just at——" Suddenly he checked himself, adding in a constrained tone: "What could it have been?" He remembered that a "shot" in Eight had preceded the commotion he had witnessed there at daybreak. But because he had witnessed it while in the pursuit of his professional duties he hesitated to speak of it.

Dad pulled off his cap and smoothed back the thin hair above his temples. He shook his head slowly. "I got everything out of the men they knew, and all they knew was that there was an explosion that filled th' tunnel with racket, only it wasn't near 'em. They couldn't locate it. Wall, I went in 's soon 's I could git head 'r tail t' their story, but there wa'n't no smell 'r dust that showed an explosion near."

"And you haven't any idea, any theory——"

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Ross's tone was embarrassed but Dad did not notice it.

He replaced his cap and regarded Ross earnestly. "Now, Doc, there's jest one way t' explain it, and that don't explain, because I can't see why he'd do such a fool thing!"

"Well?"

"The only thing I can figger on is that Kansas is a-breakin' through int' our tunnel."

"Breaking into Seven!" Ross ejaculated. "What for?"

"That's jest it!" Dad rejoined. "What 'ud he do such a fool thing fer? But if he is"—here Dad's face darkened—"ye can depend on it he's got some scheme up his sleeve. He's a deep one!" bitterly.

Again Ross opened his lips, and again closed them. That bitterness in Dad's tone closed them. He knew nothing that would add to Dad's information and telling that he had witnessed the excitement at Eight that morning would simply fan the flame of Dad's resentment. There were enough flames being fanned now in camp. Ross felt of the letter in his breast pocket and merely asked:

"How far would he have to go out of his way to break in?"

"Wall, I reckon the ends of our tunnels is as much as a quarter of a mile apart."

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"Dad," exclaimed Ross after a pause, "if Kansas is a 'deep one' I don't believe he'd take time to drive a branch tunnel a quarter of a mile to break into Seven, and," wonderingly, "what earthly object would he have in breaking in?"

"That's what I can't see myself, as I told ye," Dad affirmed. "I can't see what good it 'ud do him. If he's spoilin' fer a fight he can have one from th' mouth of th' tunnel without drivin' one a quarter of a mile fer th' sake of gittin' in. But—Doc, that explosion come from some'ers, and Eight's th' only place it could come from. And s' long 's we didn't hear it outside it must 'a' been in th' tunnel of Eight."

"Did any of them hear an explosion from there before?"

"Nope. Of course we know when Eight set off a shot—we're near enough together fer that, but it's no sech racket as my men heard this morning."

"Well, if he was breaking in, Dad, wouldn't you keep hearing the shots louder and louder as each was put?"

Dad nodded. "Yes, but as I figger it out, this one wa'n't really as near as th' men think. In th' tunnel, everything sounds louder and all twisted. I'm thinkin' this was th' first, and there'll be others."

"Have you heard any more of 'em?"

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"Nope, not a sound. That's botherin' me now. I've been in there most of the day, and I've listened all th' way along the timbers—ye know we have t' timber most all th' way—and I can't hear a sound."

"Well, Dad, that is sort of mysterious," exclaimed Ross after a pause, "but there's one thing I believe," the boy spoke earnestly, "and that is that Kansas isn't spoiling for a fight or a fuss any more than you are, and that he's as anxious to have the camps keep out of the mix-up. Dad, I can't help thinking that Kansas is *square*."

Dad's kind face took on an unpleasant expression. "Let 'im abide by th' stakes around Seven then, and give up th' intersection."

"But, Dad," Ross urged, "he thinks he's right, of course, same as you do, and ——"

A troubled expression replaced the displeasure in Dad's face. He continued abruptly down the trail, calling over his shoulder: "Wall, Doc, keep on thinkin' that 'r anything else 'bout 'im only so ye keep out of the mess."

Ross stood watching him out of sight. "Yes," he muttered aloud, "I'm keeping out of the mess with a vengeance!"

Then he continued up the trail.

He thought again of the explosion that had been heard in Seven. It was decidedly queer, that

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explosion. Yet he did not, for a moment, believe that Kansas was driving into Seven. He knew from the actions of the men that whatever had occurred in Eight that morning had come as a surprise to Kansas Brown's brother and his shift of Mexicans. He did not have long to puzzle over the situation, however, as Mucker met him at the foot of the ledge. It was evident that the boy had been patiently awaiting him for some time—or awaiting the candy, rather. But Ross's heart bounded when he saw the vacant face, lighted now with faint eagerness, peering over a rock where the trail bent around the ledge. Here was his opportunity.

"Hello, Mucker!" he yelled. He drew a large stick of candy from his pocket and held it up. The Mucker came hurrying and stumbling forward to receive it. It was evident he had now no fear that Ross would "git him."

"How's your hand?" Ross asked, picking it up and looking at the soiled bandage. He pressed on the palm and Mucker, with a cry, wrenched it away.

His ready tears started with the pain of the pressure, but they did not interfere with the action of his jaws. In a moment the pain was forgotten and his hand was held out for more candy.

"Not much!" said Ross firmly. "No more

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until we get over on Gales Ridge, you and I. If you'll go home with me"—despite himself his voice became husky with anxiety—"you can have all of this." From pocket after pocket he pulled the sweets and held them up on exhibition out of Mucker's reach. "Will you go?"

Mucker backed away whimpering. "*He'll* git me!" Then he added as an afterthought, "'N' I'm goin' t' help Kansas, too. I can't go." But the denial was faint as the boy eyed the reward for his going.

"No, he won't," Ross declared, hearing only the first clause. For emphasis he grasped Mucker's arm firmly. "Do you hear, Mucker? Your father will not touch you. I will keep you with me right in my room. Do you understand? He shall not touch you, and you can have all this candy."

The boy looked wistfully at the pockets, but backed away with the tears running down his cheeks. "I won't be here t' help Kansas, and *he'll* make me muck, and my hand ——"

"No, he won't," promised Ross emphatically. "You listen to me. If you'll go back with me I'll fix your hand so it won't hurt, and you can have all of this candy, and stay with me, and you needn't muck until your hand is well. Will you come?"

Over and over Ross repeated this, the boy yield-

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ing gradually until his last objection was not only overcome, but he was willing to go, and then eager. But it was with many misgivings that Ross accompanied him up the trail to Eight. Even if Mucker should remain constant to his promises, what would Kansas say?

This plan of using candy for a bait to get the half-wit to go back to Gales Ridge voluntarily had been the idea suggested by the sight of the lone lemon drop Ross had found in his pocket as he was standing on the ledge.

As he approached the top of the dump he heard the sound of axes away to the left. The choppers were out of sight, and above the mouth of the tunnel, where the forest of spruce thinned out as it approached timber line.

"What are the men doing, Mucker?" asked Ross.

"Timberin'," replied the boy. "All of 'em timberin' to-day—chop, chop, chop." With the imitativeness of a child he handled an imaginary axe in action.

"Not all of the men, Mucker?" asked Ross. "Part of them are working in the tunnel, aren't they?"

"Nope," cried the Mucker, and again he wielded his imaginary axe. "Not all day."

Ross gave a short whistle. Dad had been lis-

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tening all day in the tunnel of Seven for additional sounds from Eight, and there had been no sound. Of course not, if no one had been at work in Eight! Ross glanced into the dark mouth of the tunnel as he passed it. In the doorway of the eating shack sat the cook, a Mexican, rolling a cigarette, and observing him out of sleepy eyes. The place was singularly quiet. The newcomer crossed the dump and entered the bunk house. The bunks occupied at night by the day shift were now filled by the night shift and their foreman, Kansas' brother Jean.

The latter occupied Kansas' bunk, and roused himself at once when Ross appeared. Ross, looking about for Kansas, suddenly bethought him that Kansas was the head of the day shift and consequently was out now cutting and trimming trees for the "timbering" in the tunnel. He wouldn't see Kansas, with whom he had thought he would have to deal, and the brother was an unknown quantity to him and he to the brother.

Feeling balked at every turn Ross looked the sick man over silently, whispered some directions to Brown, left some tablets with him and then motioned to him to come out of the bunk house, where they could speak without disturbing the sleepers. Mucker followed close on Ross's heels, his gaze never wandering far from the candy-filled pockets.

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Once outside the bunk house Ross's courage faltered. Brown's attitude toward him was decidedly hostile. The man resembled his younger brother, except in forcefulness. He stood in his flannel shirt, his corduroy trousers and socks, just as he had been sleeping. His hair was ruffled and his eyes swollen with sleep. He stuffed his hands into his pockets and scowled at Ross without a word, and it instantly occurred to the latter that here was the beginning of the harmful results which would follow MacFadden's sight of the letter to the older Grant.

"Say," Ross burst out awkwardly, "about Mucker here—I guess I better take him home with me, hadn't I?"

It wasn't in the least what he had intended to say. He had intended to get at the matter with some tact and diplomacy. He had rehearsed what he was going to say as he bent over Rodrigo, but when he faced that scowl all he could think of was the simple proposition stripped of all tact. He bit his lips, angry at his own stupidity but, to his surprise, the man's face lit with a flash of heartfelt relief. He never stopped, as Ross expected, to question whether or no the boy would receive kind treatment on Gales Ridge, but the words of his assent tumbled over each other in his eagerness :

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"The Mucker? Home with ye? Say, that's the place fer him! Take him right along!"

He withdrew his hands from his pockets and stepped forward. His manner fairly pushed the two away from Eight. He was anxious for them to be gone. Ross covered his surprise as well as he could. He had failed to consider the fact before that the Browns were not harboring the boy because they wanted to, but because he had fled to Kansas as a refuge, and Kansas had not the heart to turn him away even though the harboring meant personal danger to himself.

Ross wondered that he had not before considered the matter strictly from Kansas' standpoint. He laid his hand lightly on the letter beneath the breast of his sweater, and then pulled a long stick of pink and white candy from his pocket and held it out to the already hesitating Mucker with a "Come on, then, if you want more of this."

The boy's hesitation disappeared, and he followed Ross across the dump. As they reached the eating house, the latter called over his shoulder:

"Tell your brother I'll see to it that Mucker is treated right; and I'll fix up his hand, too, before I let him go back to work."

"All right, Doc, I'll tell 'im," called Brown, relief ringing in his tone.

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There was also relief in Ross's heart. It mounted to exultation as he descended the trail. He had not thought clearly beyond the point of persuading Mucker to return with him. The entire plan hinged on that. In his pocket was the letter, still sealed, and behind him came the boy willingly.

"I have won," exulted Ross. Then, after a moment he added aloud with a touch of uneasiness, "Almost."

He glanced across the cañon at the side of Gales Ridge, and, for the first time, faced in detail the end of his scheme. For the first time he saw the faces of the men who had signed that letter; now he began to anticipate their anger at being baffled a second time. He cleared his throat. It became husky as the realization grew that he was approaching one of the most difficult situations he had ever encountered, one that called for the exercise of skill in conveying an impression in manner as well as words, a skill which he knew he did not possess.

"But I've got to make good," he kept telling himself desperately, "I've got to. Too much depends on it."

What he intended to do seemed so simple when he had thought of it vaguely with more immediate duties looming between it and him. Now, the anticipation weakened his knees.

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"I never was good at fooling people," he groaned. "But this time I must—I must!"

He kept insisting on this, but it did not strengthen his knees.

"All I have to do is to act naturally," he muttered aloud. "Everything I've got to do is to tell the truth—part of it—and it's all plausible."

To assure himself, he took the letter out and looked carefully at the flap of the envelope. Only the closest scrutiny showed that it had been tampered with. But suppose Boots should give it that kind of scrutiny? Boots appeared to be as keen as he was spry. With a "gone" feeling in the pit of his stomach, he replaced the letter and looked at Mucker's bandaged hand. That would bear the closest scrutiny.

Finally the knowledge that he was obliged to go through with the undertaking steadied him to a point where he could plan coherently. He felt it was best not to reach the office until it was filled with the Gales Ridge men waiting for the arrival of the stage. He knew that Boots would be present, as many of the signers of that letter as were able to gather would be there eager to see the result of their message. He drew out his watch and found it was five o'clock. There were two hours yet to waste. He had not expected that his stay on Dundee would be so short—and so comfortable. He descended to the cañon

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slowly, bent with dogged determination on getting a firm hold on himself. He talked to Mucker, helping him down the difficult places as he would have helped a child, soothing his fears and winning his confidence.

At the foot of the trail he again consulted his watch. It was six. He drew Mucker one side and by a judicious feeding from his pockets kept him contented for an hour while they sat on a rock.

But the strain of idle waiting threatened to destroy the self-control which Ross's will power had induced, and if Dad Page had appeared the boy would have promptly thrown the whole matter into his hands. But Dad did not appear, and presently Ross, taking a fresh grip on his courage, turned resolutely to Mucker's head for diversion. The younger boy sat at his feet, chewing candy noisily. The left side of his head was turned toward Ross and the embryo surgeon, speaking soothingly to him, examined that curiously dented side. Slowly his fingers felt their way over the dent and around its edges among the whitened hair. Then he whistled.

"I'd like to have Dr. Gaynor get hold of your head, Mucker," he exclaimed finally. "I wonder if Scudder has ever examined it. Has he, Mucker?"

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The boy looked up uncomprehendingly, and asked for more candy.

"Has Dr. Scudder ever had his hands on your head?" asked Ross, choosing simple words.

"Nope," said Mucker, shaking his head violently. "Nobody but *him* ever hit me," misunderstanding the question.

Ross did not correct his impression, but asked, "Do you mean your father hit you once?"

Mucker nodded. "Yep. Threw a stick of wood at me when he was actin' queer—like he is now," the boy added. Then he held his hand at the height of a child of six or seven saying, "I was so high. It hurt 'n' hurt."

"I don't doubt it!" agreed Ross, his fingers in the depression in the boy's head.

"I want t' stay with Kansas," Mucker broke out vehemently, "fer I'm goin' t' do somethin', I am! Somethin' fer Kansas!"

Ross nodded absently. Then drawing a long breath, he started on the last stage of his journey down the cañon and up the side of Gales Ridge. Half-way up he heard far below, in the clear air, the crack of Bill Travers' whip and the sound of his stentorian voice. The stage was coming, far down the cañon. Ross hurried, and close on his heels trod Mucker, whimpering with fear now that they were approaching the cabin among the pines.

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"Never mind, Mucker," soothed Ross. "Remember that you are going to stay with me as long as your father continues to act 'queer.' Come on."

He took the boy's hand and led him past the cabin toward Dr. Scudder's shack. The silence reigning in the office did not deceive him. He heard no voice raised, but he was prepared for what he saw—a room filled with the Gales Ridge men. They occupied the benches, the trunk, the counter which supported the post-office boxes. They leaned against the walls and even sat cross-legged on the floor. And every man had his eyes fixed eagerly and triumphantly on Doc Tenderfoot bringing Mucker home.

Ross, at the door, dropped Mucker's hand, and pushing the boy ahead of him to prevent his breaking away at sight of his father, who sat behind the stove, entered the smoke-filled office.

"Good-evening," he greeted the men, and was surprised and encouraged to find his voice sounded natural.

He guided Mucker to the kitchen door and yelled at Hank for the benefit of the crowd, "Here, Hank, fill this boy up right off. He's starved, and so am I."

Hank watched Ross's finger pointing at his own mouth and Mucker's and went about supper with

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alacrity. Mucker stayed in the kitchen hiding behind the door to avoid his father's eyes.

"Here's a piece of candy, Mucker," Ross said, also for the benefit of their audience, "and after supper I'll dress your hand. You can get along with it for another hour, I think, comfortably, although it is a pretty bad hand."

Again he was delighted to find his tone casual, natural, even careless. He made his way among the waiting, silent men to the stove and held his hands out to the warmth. "Great old country this!" he exclaimed. "July is the name of the month, but October is the *feel* of it!"

He directed his remark where every one was now expectantly gazing—at Boots. Boots stood where Dad had stood the previous night, leaning against the door-jamb, endeavoring to hide his elation under an air of nonchalance. He was smoking a short pipe and drew at it twice before removing it from his mouth to answer Ross. Then with a chuckle and a wink at the room in general:

"I guess the month feels as hot right now as an eastern July to some folks, all right—eh, boys?"

The boys made satisfactory response. The question set free their triumphant hilarity. They laughed. They whacked each other on the back and smote their own knees in an uproar befitting victors. They yelled into each other's ears that

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the upper camp was afraid of 'em, and that it 'ud have to eat its own words—they'd see to that! Wait till to-morrow!

Ross faltered. He looked about. As soon as he could be heard he asked: "What's all this about? What do you mean?"

Every one looked again at Boots. He stuffed his pipe full of tobacco, crammed it down with a blunt finger and replied in a blunter voice: "Wall, Doc, I guess ye know well enough what we mean by this time, without askin'." Then abruptly, "Did Kansas send us any word along with Mucker?"

"Kansas!" cried Ross, while his heart beat like a drum in his ears. "Kansas! Jiminy Crickets, here's that letter! I never set eyes on Kansas!"

He tore open the breast of his sweater and held out the letter with well feigned dismay. It was a genuine movement of helplessness that really accurately portrayed his state of mind, but the real cause was not suspected by his audience. About him swelled a murmur of astonishment, chagrin, inquiry. The letter was snatched from his hand and passed to Boots before the latter could reach him.

Boots' pipe fell to the floor as he seized the letter face up and with a quick turn of the wrist brought the flap into view—the securely sealed flap. Then

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he stared at Ross with a lengthening face and asked sharply :

“D’ye mean that ye never give this letter t’ Kansas?”

“No,” confessed Ross, “I didn’t.” He pulled off his cap and ran his fingers through his hair. His fingers trembled, but his voice did not. “You see, it was this way: When I got over there I found Mucker’s hand needed dressing, and I knew I could dress it better here in the office—and so I was busy coaxing him to come back with me—and Kansas was away with the day shift getting timbers, and so ——”

Ross stopped, replaced his cap and held out his hand. “Remember what I said before I went, don’t you? That if I brought the letter back I’d go over on purpose with it. I’ll go now.”

A deep silence had settled over the room, but it was no longer vibrant with suppressed triumph. Boots, to whom every one was looking, hesitated an instant, ignored Ross’s outstretched hand, and opening the stove door, leaned over, and threw the letter in. When he straightened he did not look up. He spoke mumblingly :

“No matter now about it. I happen to know what—what the foreman wanted, and it’s—well, it’s fixed up now. No use of yer taking the letter now.”

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Ross nodded, glad that no oral reply was necessary. He had "made good" by not delivering the letter, and yet by fulfilling himself the very demand made by the letter. With Mucker on Gales Ridge and with Kansas ignorant of the insult framed by the twelve signers with the express purpose of arousing him to fight, the belligerent scheme fell through. Then, too, the signers were left in ignorance of the sympathies of "Doc Tenderfoot" as he, too, was supposedly ignorant of the firebrand which he had forgotten to deliver. The proof of his ignorance lay in his ready offer to take the letter back to Kansas and in the fact that he had handed it over to Boots apparently sealed as at first. Then, too, Mucker's hand bore evidence to the reason why its owner was brought back by the embryo surgeon.

Boots kicked his broken pipe out-of-doors and followed it. His very back showed his chagrin. He stopped outside the door and looked down at the stage, which was approaching the foot of the trail. The group inside began to fall apart. One or two went into the kitchen to look at Mucker's hand. Others joined the disconcerted Boots and spoke of the prospects of fine weather for the Fourth.

Suddenly Harve, standing in the doorway, remarked, "There comes Bill, and he hain't got nary

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a passenger. That means that he's had room t' pack us up some refreshment fer the Fourth!"

Ross heard only the first of the remark. He was dressing Mucker's hand and could not leave, but he called out insistently, "See here, Harve, he must have a passenger—isn't Dr. Scudder in the stage?"

"No, he ain't," returned Harve shortly. "Ain't no one but Bill."

Five minutes later the tramping of many feet on the ledge proclaimed the arrival of Bill, surrounded by the men who had gone to meet him, and Bill was explaining loudly:

"Say, fellers! What d'ye think is a-goin' on in Meeteetse to-morrer?" He waited, looking about expectantly.

No one replied. Meeteetse, being forty miles away, held no prospect of immediate interest.

Bill raised an impressive forefinger. "Seein' ye ain't good at guessin' I'll tell ye. There's a circus in Meeteetse to-morrer. 'N'—now listen, boys, 'n' then hustle int' yer glad rags! Dr. Scudder 'n' Sims is a-treatin' th' Gales Ridge outfit t' a Fourth in Meeteetse."

A stir of interest aroused the roomful from the depression caused by their late defeat. They crowded closer to Bill.

"Right now Sims' freightin' wagins is on the

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road t' fetch ye. They'll heave in sight now any minit and ye're all t' pile in and be packed down t' Meeteetse t' celebrate—and Sims says tell ye the treat is on him and the doctor!"

CHAPTER IX

A SAFE FOURTH

BILL'S message caused a pleasant agitation behind the post-office boxes as well as in front. Ross found himself stamping the date of arrival not only on the letters but the newspapers as well. Mahomet, he told himself with a grin, not being ready to come to the mountain, was arranging for the mountain to go to him! Or, literally, beyond him, as Sims' ranch lay near the foot of the mountains thirty miles from Meeteetse.

Sims and his guest were keeping their promise to "Doc Tenderfoot" in a negative way, but, as he saw, a more effective way than for the doctor to return. For, by taking one entire faction out of Miners' for the Fourth, all danger of a fight would be averted. Evidently his protests against being obliged to assume the doctor's responsibility had sunk in more deeply than he had hoped for.

Sims' invitation galvanized the Gales Ridge men into immediate action. There was more interest expressed in safety razors and clean shirts than in the few letters, papers and magazines

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that Ross was laboriously sorting and distributing. The letter to Kansas Brown was forgotten in the promised excitement of a circus and dance in Meeteetse.

Within fifteen minutes the office was deserted. Fifteen more and Ross sat down to a hot supper, feeling that he was on the eve of a Fourth "safe and sane" to an extent that would astonish Uncle Fred and Aunt Anne, whose understanding of the term was the absence of firecrackers in the hands of the village children. His perplexities seemed dissolved, with Mucker gobbling his food contentedly opposite and the camp getting ready to celebrate away from home, forty miles away.

"The further the better," Ross told himself, stretching his legs out under the table and patting his stomach with a grin at Hank, who fed his plate with hot flapjacks.

From the open window in front of him he could see the sunlit side of old Dundee. The water was racing in miniature torrents down its sides as the heat drove the snow-banks further up toward the permanent snow line. Below, in the cañon, the roar of Wood River was borne aloft as it rushed past bank full. It was choked with ice, yet tomorrow was the Fourth of July! Ross filled his lungs with the bracing air which came in at the opened sash and attacked another piece of ham.

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Suddenly he leaned forward, his head out of the window, and looked up the cañon. "Now I wonder," he ejaculated to Mucker, "whether the upper camp won't go to Meeteetse too, when it finds out what the attractions there are."

Mucker answered only by a demand for more coffee, while Ross continued more to himself than the boy :

"Well, if they do go and get into a fight down there I'll be out of it, anyway." But he kept looking anxiously up the quiet cañon. The stage driver put up at the upper camp and would, of course, carry the news of the celebration at Meeteetse and the fact that the Gales Ridge outfit were going.

Before the watcher had finished supper Sims' two freighter outfits were standing in the wagon trail waiting for the men of the lower camp, and Ross, followed by Mucker, went out on the ledge to see them depart. As he stood there Boots came hurrying around the corner of Wort's shack and approached with a friendly and confidential grin, a very different expression from the one Ross had encountered when he handed over the letter addressed to Kansas a few hours earlier. The change in expression surprised him, but Boots' first remark surprised him still more.

"Say, Doc," he called eagerly, "the wagons are

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waitin', but it won't hurt 'em t' wait some more while ye git ready."

"What?" asked Ross. "Me—get ready for what?"

"The boys sent me down t' ask ye would ye go with us below?"

"Why, thank you—and them," stammered Ross. "But—why, no, I couldn't."

"Ye can leave Mucker with Hank all right," Boots urged cordially, "'n' git out 'n' have a little fun."

Ross thanked him again, but declined. "I was up all last night, you know," he reminded him, "and a bunk is going to suit me better to-night than a wagon seat."

"Ye could lay out in th' wagon bottom," suggested Boots affably, "and git in a few cat-naps."

"With Dr. Scudder gone," Ross objected, "I couldn't leave, anyway. My place is here." Then as Boots still waited expectantly, he added with finality, "No, I can't possibly go. I've got a patient here, you know, the Mexican and ——" He drew Mucker around to his side and touched the bandaged hand.

Boots smoothed his recently shaved cheeks and winked. "All right, Doc. Guess ye know what ye're up to, stayin' here, but—our boys are sorry

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the upper camp's caught on. We've jest heard ourselves."

"Heard what?" demanded Ross. "What d'ye mean?"

Boots rubbed his chin tenderly. "I told th' boys I bet ye didn't know th' upper camp had got hold of it, but how could they when ye've kept it s' tight from us that we've sort of suspected ye right along 'til now!"

"What are you talking about?" Ross insisted, bewildered.

Boots winked again slyly: "Why, that ye come here a-purpose t' settle this fuss on Dundee——"

"*What!*" exploded Ross. "I settle the fuss? Come on purpose! Did you hear that from the upper camp?"

Boots nodded. "Yep. Sorry they've got ont' it—that 'n' yer sendin' fer Razorback Jones t' come here and help us run Kansas t' where he belongs. They say yer father 'n' his money is behind ye."

"My father doesn't know anything about the matter!" cried Ross, "and neither did I when I came here!"

Boots began to pare his finger nails industriously with his jack-knife. His amused chuckle told Ross that he did not believe the denial.

"What else have you heard?"

Boots finished a thumb nail and looked at it

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critically. "That ye stayed last night with Rod so ye'd have a good chance to spy out Eight. That's what Mac is tellin'."

Ross choked in anger. "There's not a word of truth in it!" he fairly shouted. "I went over to Eight as Dr. Scudder's assistant, and not to find out anything about the Browns' business."

Boots grinned sympathetically. "I don't blame ye, Doc, fer gittin' mad about it. Of course it sort of holds up a little business such as ye have in hand t' have it peddled 'round the camp, but," suggestively, "ye know th' Gales Ridge outfit is back of ye."

This calm and matter-of-fact assumption as to the cause of his wrath took Ross's breath away. He stammered, "I—why, I ——" and stopped.

"Mac don't say how he got ont' all this," Boots went on, closing his knife with a snap. "But if there's anything t' find out Mac's bound t' know it. He oughter be a detective, he had."

Before Ross could reply, a voice from the bunk house above them summoned Boots, and the latter obeyed the summons spryly, calling over his shoulder :

"S' long, Doc. Remember if ye need us we're all here."

He left Ross still sputtering and mopping a red, wet face.

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"Such a story!" he burst out to the uncomprehending Mucker. "Spy on Eight! Run Kansas off Dundee. The liar! I could punch his head for him!"

He was glad, however, that his anger and surprise had not betrayed him into indiscreet speech about the action of MacFadden. The Gales Ridge outfit were uncomfortably ready to back any move against any one in the upper camp. If they could not get at Kansas directly, his chief supporter, MacFadden, would do as well. The cooler Ross became, the more clearly he saw that it was well his denial had not been believed. So long as the lower camp believed MacFadden was telling the truth there was no excuse for punishing him!

"I'm glad enough that his seeing that page was not due to my carelessness," Ross thought finally when he was able to think coolly again.

He realized that the merchant, with a kernel of truth to water, had caused it to spring into a crop of lies, and the trouble with them was they would be difficult to refute, so neatly did they fit the circumstances.

"The more I'm told to keep out of this squabble the deeper in I wade—or am pushed, rather," he muttered.

Just then the Gales Ridge men went trooping down the trail, waving and shouting at the boy on

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the ledge, jubilantly confident that he was not only on their side but bent on bringing their desires to pass. Their comradery was gratifying, despite the false assumption it was based on, and Ross watched the loaded wagons depart, glad they were filled with his friends.

Bringing a chair out on the ledge, he sat down, letter pad in hand, to scribble a note to Dr. Lambert, and at the same time watch the cañon for signs of the upper camp men. He had not long to wait. They came rattling down the cañon in the heavy four-horse wagon belonging to the mining company. They were laughing and shouting as gayly as though they had not been anticipating spending a very different Fourth only a few hours before. After them, straggling along the trail, came the Mexicans who worked in Eight, and the younger men belonging to the upper camp and to Dad Page's outfit, for whom there was no room in the wagon. But neither Dad Page nor the Browns appeared. They were evidently up on Dundee guarding Seven and Eight.

Ross watched the travelers out of sight and then, uncapping his fountain pen, threw one knee over the other and propping the pad against it proceeded to scrawl a letter to the intern.

"It's a shame," he wrote, "that Kansas and Dad are at loggerheads. They're both crackerjacks of

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fellows and ought to be working together instead of against each other. I don't know who'll come out ahead, nor whether Razorback can untangle things, but I think both Dad and Kansas want the thing settled. I know Dad does, and I can guess Kansas does too, so unearth this Razorback and telegraph me his address sooner than at once! I've written to the hospital, but you can speed things up quicker, probably. I don't want to hang out here in the midst of all this uncertainty and all the stories this MacFadden is circulating ——”

These words started Ross on a new train of thought, and brought his pen to a standstill. If the lower camp had heard all that trash, of course the men on Dundee had, also. Dad must be wondering why he, Ross, had not heeded good advice and kept his mouth shut about Razorback! It would be easy enough to satisfy Dad in the matter, but what about Kansas? It occurred to him again that the story dovetailed in very well with the few facts that were known in camp—no one would see that more quickly than Kansas. Ross recalled the other's surprise at his close attention to the Mexican, at his willingness to remain all night beside the sick man. Now, when Kansas heard MacFadden's version of why he was willing to remain ——

The boy rose abruptly and stood on the edge of

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the ledge. His liking for Kansas was so genuine that he shrank from having him believe such a misrepresentation. He stood thinking until a chilling breeze swept down from the snow-fields. Then he went inside followed by a shivering, whimpering Mucker.

Setting the younger boy the task of keeping up the fire, Ross went behind the post boxes to finish the task, suddenly grown so distasteful, of putting Lambert on the trail of Razorback. He dropped on the bench and, elbow on shelf and head on hand, thought. A pile of mail, letters, magazines and papers lay in front of him. He absently turned them over. They were all addressed to Dr. Scudder. There was one letter evidently directed by a child. Ross picked it up. Zigzagging across the envelope in laborious print ran the unique address, "My Papa Scudder, Minners, Wyoming Camp."

Ross burst out laughing, the first genuine spark of amusement he had felt since he arrived in Miners' Camp. Some postal clerk had, down in one corner, put the "Camp" in its correct place in the address, and the letter had arrived without delay from Boston. Ross propped it up against the rest of the doctor's mail, his amusement giving way to interest. He had not thought, previously, anything about the doctor's family. The camp

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was no place for women and children and he had not considered his chief as "My Papa Scudder." Then the vision of that object on Scudder's table flashed into his mind. "I guess you better stay right along in Boston," he said to the letter. "You'll be better off there."

He had just succeeded in fastening his attention again on his own letter when Mucker slammed the door of the stove, raced to the outer door and shrilled, "Here comes Kansas!"

"'Lo, Mucker," returned Kansas' pleasant voice. "Got all the candy ye want?"

Mucker at once turned to Ross with the demand for more. Interest in fire-tending had temporarily effaced his memory of sweets. Ross gave him a stick of peppermint flavor, telling him to make it go a long way, as it would be the last for that night. He was glad of the diversion created by Mucker because of Kansas' manner.

"Evenin'," was the latter's brief greeting. "Any mail fer us?"

He did not even glance at the younger man as he spoke, but stared at his post box.

Ross handed out a couple of magazines with the question, "How's Rodrigo?" He stammered in his embarrassment at Kansas' cold, distrustful manner.

"He'll git along until Dr. Scudder comes back,"

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replied Kansas with an emphasis which could not be mistaken.

The blood rushed to Ross's face and he asked bluntly: "Does that mean you don't want me to go over and see him to-morrow?"

"It means jest that!" returned Kansas coolly, opening the door and shutting it hard with himself on the other side.

Ross stood with clenched fists, the blood humming through his ears, angered by Kansas' insulting manner and slighting dismissal in the face of the benefits that—"That he has no idea he has received!" came the final saving thought that undoubled the fist. Of course, he not only had no idea what the boy had done for him in the last twenty-four hours, but on the other hand he had heard those damaging tales from MacFadden, the distorted contents of the letter to the elder Grant.

Impulsively the boy reached a decision. Whatever the results, he could not bear to have Kansas think him a spy and a sneak, and believe that he used his profession as a cover for a personal intrigue. Seizing his unfinished letter to Lambert he added it to the letter to his father which still occupied his pocket and raced down the trail.

Night had fallen and the cañon was dark. As he approached it Ross was obliged to slacken his speed and feel his way forward. He was unable

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to hear Kansas' footsteps and in alarm lest he had gone beyond call, he stopped and shouted, "Kansas! Kansas Brown!"

There was no answer. He stumbled along a little further and then raised his voice again, "Kansas—hello, Kansas!" adding with a note of desperation, "Wait, and you won't be sorry!"

"Well, what is it?" asked a voice so near at hand that the boy was startled. The voice was so gruff and forbidding that he did not at first recognize it as Kansas'. He hurried on up the cañon. Kansas was waiting for him, but did not meet him half-way either in manner nor distance. Ross was prepared, however, to go all the way in his efforts to lay the truth before the other. He peered through the darkness anxiously, holding out the two letters.

"Read these, will you?" he asked. "I'll light matches for you to see." He lit one and held it over the envelopes.

Kansas looked at them but did not extend his hand. "What are they?" he asked.

"They're letters that I wrote without any idea of asking you to read 'em, and so you may know they tell the truth."

Kansas took them and stared down at them uncomprehendingly. "Truth about what?"

"My part in the fuss over the boundaries."

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Kansas looked up quickly and took one step nearer that he might the plainer read the boy's face.

Ross met his eyes frankly. "I'm not going to have you believe what's being told around here to-day," he went on insistently. "I've only just heard it myself, and I suppose you have."

"Heard what?" guardedly.

"That I've been a fraud and have been spying on you."

"How's that?" Kansas asked, but Ross knew that he did not need to ask.

As briefly as possible the boy told of his conversation with Boots, and of his experience with MacFadden behind the post-office boxes. "Now," the boy ended, "here is the letter from which he made up all the information that he has been giving out. Read it and judge for yourself. Will you?"

Still Kansas hesitated, looking at Ross rather than at the letters. Ross lit another match and held it up so that the two could see each other's faces plainly.

"All I ask," Ross urged, "is that you'll read what MacFadden read and draw your own conclusion instead of taking his—and he read only one page of the letter to father. I want you to read both of these."

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Quietly then, Kansas accepted the letters and read first the letter to the elder Grant and then the unfinished letter to Lambert, while Ross lighted matches and held them behind his cupped hand above the paper. The man lingered a bit over the letter to the intern, and his manner softened.

"There, now," said Ross when Kansas at last lowered the sheets. "You know all that there is to know about the matter so far as I'm concerned. I am going to try to get hold of Razorback. But I want him to tell the truth, no matter who gets the worst of it. I want the matter settled before we have a lot of heads to patch up here. But as for having it said," angrily, "that father sent me here to help run you out of camp and that I stayed with your man last night so I might pry into your tunnel—I tell you that trash makes me hot under the collar! Father never had a thought of such a thing, and I never went near the entrance of your tunnel. I stayed on Dundee because I thought it was my duty to! Now," defiantly, "you can take that or leave it, but I'm telling you exactly the truth."

Kansas looked at him steadily. "Yes," he said abruptly, "I believe ye—and I'd like t' see Razorback here as well as any one else!"

Then, as though fearing he had said too much, he whirled hastily and strode up the cañon.

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"See here!" Ross shouted stubbornly. "Does that mean then that you want me to go up to see your man to-morrow—or doesn't it?"

"Yes," came back the abrupt answer. "It means—come."

Ross drew long breaths as he climbed the trail slowly. His relief was great that he had vindicated himself to the "crackerjack of a man"! Besides, he was glad to know that Kansas would also welcome a settlement of the boundaries even though it might mean defeat for him. This confirmed his opinion of the other.

As soon as he reached the office, Ross finished up both letters and sealed them. Then he and Mucker turned in, Mucker lying behind him in a bunk built for one. But so tired was Ross that he fell asleep at once and slept until late the next morning. In fact Bill Travers banged on his door before he aroused himself to the outgoing mail and breakfast.

"Wall," grinned Bill, "I done ye a good turn by bringin' that word t' th' boys last night, hey?"

"Think you did?" responded Ross non-committally.

"Sure thing!" affirmed Bill. "Cañon'll be as peaceful as Mary's little lamb to-day—dunno what Meeteetse'll be, though. Still, it'll be so plumb full of folks that th' camps will be lost in th'

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crowd. Guess they'll pay more attention t' th' circus 'n' refreshments than t' each other."

"Which one did you see yesterday, Sims or the doctor?" asked Ross, suddenly changing the conversation.

"Oh—that—why, Sims, of course," returned Bill, carelessly, picking up the mail-bag. "Nobody ever sees th' doctor when he's down there—no one but Sims, that is. Great cronies they be, and Sims understands that the doctor wants a deal of sleep down there—more'n he can get here!"

Bill, having progressed to the doorway with the mail-bag, stopped and looked back grinning. "Say, Doc, th' camps is findin' out ye ain't no tender-foot, after all, eh?"

He winked back at Ross, but the latter was on his guard. He merely lifted his eyebrows and went into the kitchen, leaving Bill carrying away only the news he had brought.

The cañon seemed strangely lonely and desolate that morning. Ross missed the blasts that told of progress in the tunnels; missed the occasional "hiker" on the Gales Ridge trail; missed also the stress and exciting strain of the past three days. He regretted the meagerness of his duties for the day. There was nothing he was obliged to do until afternoon. Then he would visit Rodrigo, and after that he would hunt up Dad in Seven

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and have a talk with him. He could tell Dad now all about the frustrated plan centering about the letter to Kansas and tell him also about MacFadden's discovery of the stray page.

An occupation for the morning was suggested to him while he was eating breakfast. The left side of Mucker's head was toward him with its peculiar patch of gray hair above the ear, outlining the dent. In the doctor's bedroom Ross had noticed some shelves full of medical books. Half an hour later he was in pursuit of knowledge concerning the surgical possibilities of dealing with that dent, having invaded the doctor's room and found a book bearing on the subject. He also questioned Mucker again as to the circumstances attending the injury, but got no further information on the subject.

"He done it with a stick," the boy reiterated monotonously. Then he added suddenly and irrelevantly, "I know where there's matches."

"Do you?" said Ross, his fingers pressed into the dent. "See here, Mucker," he burst out, "did you ever see a train of cars?" The question was the outgrowth of a plan which had been forming in the young man's mind during the morning.

"Cars?" repeated Mucker vaguely. "What's cars?"

Ross explained at some length until he saw he

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had excited the half-wit's interest. Then he began on another tack: "In a few weeks, Mucker, I'm going to take you away on the cars. You can go with me without your father," he hastened to add, "and my pockets will be full of candy."

"For me?" asked Mucker greedily. He held out his hand. "I want some now."

Ross gave him two chocolates. One he ate and one he laid on a bench saying he was going to take it to Kansas. Soon after he wandered out on the mountainside in search of flowers to take to Kansas, but before he went, Ross was obliged to reassure him for the tenth time of his father's absence. His six-year-old mind held two emotions: fear of his father when Wort was acting "queer," and devotion to Kansas Brown. Because Kansas had told him not to "say swear words," he refrained. Kansas had told him to wash his face before he ate, and he obeyed. Out of consideration for Kansas, who disapproved of tears, Mucker suppressed many a childish briny flood.

After dinner the two prepared to visit Dundee, Ross with his turpentine and bandages, Mucker with his hands filled with wilted wild flowers. They had got as far as the end of the ledge in their journey when it was postponed by a newcomer whom a wagon had dropped at the foot of the Gales Ridge trail. He was mounting the grade

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wearily, his hat drawn low over his face and his shoulders bent under the light burden of his hand-bag. He was as well groomed as ever, but Ross, hastening to meet him, knew from the vacancy of the eyes, from the sallowness of the skin and from the effort of the mouth to remain firm, that Dr. Scudder was in the aftermath of the excessive use of morphine.

CHAPTER X

THE MORNING OF THE FIFTH

It was easy enough to judge from the doctor's appearance how he had been putting in time since he left the mountains. What Ross could not judge, however, and what he had no means of finding out at once, was that the aftermath of such a period was singularly painful and humiliating to his chief. It was a period when every nerve was a stinging lash, and all his sensibilities, once remarkably acute, were aroused in self-condemnation, poignant but helpless.

He did not look up as he mounted the trail, although he must have been aware of Ross's loud and impulsive hail. Rather, his head sank yet lower on his breast and his feet lagged reluctantly. The brilliant sunshine streaming into the cañon, the crispness of the air, the spring-like freshness of Nature as a background only served to make the approaching figure appear aged and helpless and pitifully useless.

The wagon that had brought him turned at the

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foot of the trail and started back. It was driven by Sims and although he, too, must have heard Ross he did not look up, but lounged forward on the wagon seat, one foot on the break, his elbows on his knees, his cap pulled over his face.

At the first sight of a man on the trail Mucker had slunk behind Ross, clutching the latter's sweater and asking over and over, "Who's that? Will he git me?"

Ross dropped a reassuring hand on the boy's shoulder. "It's Dr. Scudder, Mucker. Don't you remember him?"

"Yep, if 'twas 'im, but 'tain't!" declared Mucker, beginning to whimper. "I know 'im, but 'tain't 'im. It's some one t' git me. He's actin' queer. I'm goin' to hide."

"All right," returned Ross. "Hide behind your shack there if you want to. But he'll not get you. I won't let any one get you."

Mucker crept behind his father's cabin and peeked out furtively while Ross went down the trail to meet the doctor and relieve him of his bag.

He went with a cheerfulness which was painful to see because it was so forced. He was as embarrassed as though he had been caught in wrongdoing himself, and the embarrassment increased when the two reached the office and Ross, who had

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walked on ahead up the mountainside, now had no excuse for keeping his back toward the doctor. The latter sank exhausted on the bench nearest the door. For a while he kept his eyes lowered in the forlorn hope of concealing their condition from his assistant, while the assistant, recognizing the hope, looked everywhere, as he talked, except at the doctor's haggard face—and he talked incessantly. He felt driven to make conversation in order to cover the situation, and yet he did not seem able to touch on a topic which was not a rebuke to Scudder or an unsavory reminder of neglected duties. He stumbled through an account of Rodrigo's fever knowing that Dr. Scudder should have been on hand to prescribe for it. The latter knew it also. His face flushed and he began an aimless search in his bag to occupy hands and eyes.

"You—you did all right," he muttered repeatedly. "I would have done—done the same myself."

Ross cut the narrative short, more embarrassed than ever while the doctor's search became more purposeful. He delved among the contents of the bag with hands which shook. Finally he steadied it on his knees and looked blankly at his closed bedroom door for the first time. Then it occurred to Ross what he was looking for.

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"The key!" he exclaimed. "Are you looking for the key? You left it in the lock when you went away."

The dull eyes met Ross's in a glance of suspicion that brought the blood to the younger man's face, and a hurried explanation to his lips.

"I found it—I had to find a place to put some—some whiskey where I could lock it up safely to get it out of Wort's way—and I remembered that your door could be locked."

Producing the key, Ross held it out to the doctor. The latter raised his hand, noticed its helpless, shaking condition and dropped it again to the bag on his knees. Ross, so embarrassed that his own hand was unsteady, laid the key on the bench and stammered out an account of the "bust nose" and the concealing of the bottles.

The sequel to the nose, the letter to Kansas, he reserved until Dr. Scudder should be in a more receptive mood.

Slowly the doctor lowered his hand-bag to the floor, and gathered in the key. When he spoke his lips twitched and trembled. "I thought I had locked the door and—and had the key with me," he muttered. He attempted to rise but fell back weakly.

"I'll make you some coffee, doctor," exclaimed Ross, glad of an excuse to turn his back on

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this self-conscious, shaking wreck of manhood. "You've had a long ride under a hot sun, and yet the wind chills, and the altitude ——"

Leaving his disjointed sentence unfinished he beat a retreat to the kitchen, where he lingered as long as he could decently to give his chief an opportunity to pull himself together. When he came into the office again with the coffee, the other sat on the bench still, leaning against the side logs. His eyes were closed and his arms folded across his breast. His feet were stretched out and his entire bearing told of the running of a race altogether too fast for his strength.

Ross placed the steaming cup beside him and then considerately left him alone to manage it in his shaking hands. Wandering aimlessly out on the ledge, the boy found Mucker still in hiding and managed to persuade him that the newcomer was not acting "queer." "Dr. Scudder," argued Ross, "is tired and is going to sleep now"—the declaration was father to the wish—"and so you can come back to the office. After a while we'll go over and see Kansas."

Mucker ventured back to the ledge and sat in the sunshine, timidly looking at the office door. The inner relationship between the doctor and his father when the latter was "queer" had not been lost on his stunted wits.

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Presently Ross left him and returned to the office. The doctor still sat on the bench, but the coffee cup was empty. His assistant, opening the door of the medicine cupboard, began rearranging the bottles noisily. Feeling constrained to talk again he explained at length his device for holding up Wort's nose with the rubber tube, but the explanation elicited no response from the bench.

Finally Ross bethought him of the mail. "By the way, doctor," he exclaimed, diving behind the post boxes, "you have a mess of letters here. Came last night."

"Have I?" asked the other listlessly, without opening his eyes.

As Ross gathered up the letters he noticed that the one addressed in print to *My Pappa Scudder* lay on top. He hesitated and then, slipping it underneath the others, laid the pile beside the doctor and beat another retreat to the kitchen with the empty coffee cup.

"That particular letter might hit him hard in the eye right now!" he told himself. "Let 'im come to it gradually."

Standing beside the open window the boy loosened the collar of his shirt under the impression it was choking him. Hank looked at him curiously, for the wind blowing in at the open half-sash was chilly, and he had not been ex-

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ercising violently enough to produce the perspiration that beaded his face.

"There are things harder to do than handling a pick and shovel," Ross decided as he "cooled off."

Suddenly from the outer office door he heard the Mucker's voice, fear-stricken, "Where's the other one?"

"What do you want, Mucker?" asked the doctor's tired voice.

"I want the other one," quavered Mucker. "You're queer! I don't want ye! Where's the other one?"

Ross reached the door of the office in two strides and called sharply: "Here, Mucker, I'm here. What do you want?"

But Mucker, who had been peering in at the doctor from the ledge, retreated to his sunny seat contentedly when he had located "the other one."

Dr. Scudder bent a drawn face over the letter addressed to "Minners, Wyoming Camp." "What's Mucker doing here?" he asked in a muffled tone.

"Why," Ross began confusedly, "I brought him over yesterday from Dundee. He ran away to Kansas because his father——" Here the speaker caught himself and came to a dead stop.

A curious change came over Dr. Scudder. The

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blood left his face. His fingers clutched the childish letter until his knuckles were white. He looked at Ross, straight, clear faced, steady, and then burst out miserably, savagely, with an astonishing absence of self-control :

“Oh, say it! Don’t stop for me. Say it, I tell you! You started to say ‘because his father isn’t to be trusted with a child.’ That’s what you wanted to say and you want to say it to me, too! And I say more! I’ll say that a man who has my habits or Wort’s has no right to a family.”

Ross, dismayed by the outburst so foreign to the other’s nature, ignored the speech and plunged headlong into a discussion of Mucker’s skull. That seemed like a safe and unsuggestive topic.

Dr. Scudder sat clutching his unopened letter. He stared as persistently at his assistant now as he had previously avoided looking at him. His face was distorted by the emotions surging riotously within him, unleashed by the weakness of his will.

“Tell you what,” Ross exclaimed finally exhausting his “safe” topic, “I’ve an idea! I’m going to put Mucker up to my father, and I know he’ll come down with a check! I want to get that boy under Dr. Gaynor’s eye. I believe he could raise the skull where it’s smashed in on that side. Then with the brain relieved of pressure,

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Mucker could get to be like the rest of us. I'm going to take him to Dr. Gaynor if such a thing is possible."

"Why not to me?" demanded Dr. Scudder, sharply.

He leaned forward, dropping the letter to the floor. He rested his elbows on his knees, his long, delicate fingers doubling and undoubling nervously. He pushed his cap back from a moist forehead and looked at Ross compellingly from under heavy, tired lids, his voice increasing in harshness and persistency as he went on:

"Why do you leave me out of the matter? Dr. Gaynor would tell you I'm a more skilful surgeon than he. And I'm here, while he is across the continent. Why not me, Grant?"

Ross gasped. He stammered and writhed, but Dr. Scudder's relentless and repeated, "Why not?" held him until the unvarnished truth came out in a sledge-hammer blow:

"Because of the hypodermic syringe I found in your room. I'd not like to put any one's life in the hands of a surgeon who—uses 'dope.'"

Dr. Scudder sprang to his feet. Ross did not realize that the former's questions had been but one of the thumb-screws with which he had been torturing himself. Now he walked the floor rapidly, unsteadily, raging at himself while Ross

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listened aghast at the misery in the other's tone and the utter abandonment in his manner.

"I got into this thing when I first began my practice," the man rapped out as though his habit was a thing of form and substance. "I wanted to get ahead faster. I overworked and began to take morphine to steady me—to brace me for more work. Before I knew it the habit had me in its grip, and I couldn't stop. Before I realized it I had given away my future. Morphine had taken it—deformed it—thrown me down from positions of trust—my wife can't live with me—my children I've not seen in two years—even these miners are beginning to distrust me ——"

Ross backed up against the doctor's door. "See here, sir," he finally broke in. "Why don't you stop? Why don't you go back East and build up your practice again? You have the fingers—and the head—and the knowledge, and the friends ready to help. Why don't you quit?"

The tortured man swung around and faced the boy with his rugged clean strength untouched by vice. "You don't even know what you're saying, and you may thank God that you don't! You have never been in the hell of a habit that's bigger than you, and mightier."

"No, sir," returned Ross emphatically, "I have never been, and what's more I'm never going to

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be. I can't afford it. I've got to keep my hand and head steady. That's part of the business of surgery, the most important part. Uncle Fred made me see that."

"You ought to thank God then for an Uncle Fred"—here the doctor stopped in his feverish pace and swung around facing Ross—"and thank Him too for common sense enough to take the best advice ever given a young fellow. I had enough advice thrown at my head, but it never soaked in. Now I'm paying the price."

With a groan he threw himself on the bench and picked up his child's letter. "I'm paying the price," he moaned again. "It tastes as bitter as death, the price does, but I'm bound to pay it—bound ——"

He arose again with all the strength gone which agitation had given him and staggered across the room to his door. After he had unlocked it, he turned again to Ross. His voice had lost its unnaturally harsh, high-pitched tone. He spoke with an unutterable sadness.

"Grant, you'll do well to remember, always, that a steady hand and head are part of your business."

"But," Ross insisted ardently, "you can come back to a steady hand. I know that it is done—you can head off this—this habit ——"

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The doctor paused, one hand on the opened door. "Grant, the saddest, most hopeless thing about it is that the time comes when you don't want to quit. I'm there now."

"No, no!" Ross shouted. "You're not there now. You do want to quit. You've just said it—acted it at least——"

The doctor looked at him helplessly. "I want it—yes, to-day. To-morrow——" he ended with a pitiful shrug of the shoulders. "This"—he held up the letter, "and you"—he passed his hand across his forehead, "have brought me to my senses for a moment only."

"But right now you can resolve——" urged Ross.

The doctor interrupted. "Resolve, Grant! Resolve? There are not enough days in the year to hold my broken resolutions. There's just one way to reform me, and no one has the power to do it! I would have to be 'roped and branded,' as the saying goes here, and *compelled to quit*."

He stopped abruptly and, entering his room, locked the door. For some time he moved about restlessly on one side of that door and Ross on the other. The boy was deeply moved by the humiliation and shame and despair of his chief. He felt ashamed because of the other's weakness, but he could not realize the helplessness that ac-

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accompanied the weakness. Several times he held out his right arm and clenching his fist, felt the strong healthy bunching of the muscles. It was an arm strong enough to "rope and brand" Dr. Scudder—but the roping of his habit was a different matter. The boy thought of Dr. Gaynor and wondered if he could "handle the case" the other side of the locked door. His faith in Gaynor was supreme.

Finally the pacing in the doctor's bedroom ceased and the silence made Ross shiver. He feared that, after the nerve-racking scene through which the older man had just passed, he would resort again to the hypodermic syringe.

Finally, unable to endure the silence longer, he stepped to the door and rapped, calling: "Oh, doctor, by the way, if you'll hand out Wort's old bag I'll take it in my room out of your way."

The door did not open. There was a moment's pause and then the other's voice, devoid suddenly of the emotions that had torn it, answered hoarsely: "It's not in my way at all, Grant—and your room can't be locked up!"

Ross backed away from the door. "Well," he decided, "I have no power to rope him and tie him and make him quit—but I'm certainly in a tight box here!" He hung around for another hour before visiting his patient on Dundee, hoping

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that the doctor would appear, but not another sound issued from the bedroom. Finally he rapped and called repeatedly, but was answered only by a drowsy murmur, and, realizing that the man was again under the influence of the drug, Ross, in dismay, set out for Dundee, followed by Mucker.

As they reached the cañon, the boy suddenly announced triumphantly: "I know where they's some matches!"

"Do you?" commented Ross absently.

His thoughts were not on Mucker's detached speech, but on Dr. Scudder with his wasted knowledge, his unused skill and, what to Ross was worse, his capacity for doing mischief when entrusted with the lives he was expected to aid.

"I wouldn't want him dosing me after seeing the state that medicine cupboard is in, to say nothing of the state his nerves are in,—and as to surgery——" Ross shivered and looked at the dent over Mucker's ear.

As the two passed under the dump of Seven, Ross looked up searchingly, but saw nothing of Dad.

"We'll go up and visit Seven on our way home," he told Mucker as he led the way on the narrow, perilous trail below the ledge and climbed the dump of Eight in silence.

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As he emerged above the dump he saw evidences of timbering in the tunnel. The end of a small tree trunk was disappearing into the mouth. Kansas must have been at the other end as Jean stood outside wiping his wet reddened face on his shirt sleeve. He turned hastily as a sneeze from Mucker betrayed the presence of callers.

"Oh, howdy, Doc!" he called, coming toward them. "I guess you'll find your patient in tolerable good shape to-day."

He conducted Ross to the bunk house at once, while a muffled sound of hammering came from the tunnel. Jean made no comments on this nor on anything else except Rodrigo and the weather, but the absence of suspicion in his manner, and his friendlier attitude, told Ross that Kansas had given a favorable account of their interview in the cañon the previous night.

Mucker, clutching his melting chocolate drops in one hand and his wilted flowers in the other, stopped protestingly when they reached the bunk house and found no one in it except the sick man.

"I want Kansas," he whimpered. "Where's Kansas?"

Jean laid his hand firmly on the boy's shoulder and steered him into the bunk house. "He's in the tunnel."

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Mucker resisted. "I've got these fer 'im," he insisted. "I want 'im."

Jean's hand did not relax its grasp. "He's workin' now and can't bother with ye," emphatically. "Stay right here."

Mucker's whimpers increased. "I—got to—tell—tell 'im somethin'."

"Well," responded Jean not unkindly, "tell me and I'll tell 'im for ye."

"I—c-can't," sobbed Mucker, one arm curved over his face. "I want t' t-tell 'im I know—matches ——"

"He has matches on the brain," said Ross, beginning to remove the bandages from Rodrigo's arm. "I'm sure I don't know what he means."

"Generally he don't mean nothin'," said Jean, "except to my brother. Kansas seems t' have a way with 'im of findin' out what's under Mucker's senseless talk. He's got a heap of patience with the boy."

"I—I want Kansas," sobbed Mucker insistently. "I'm goin'—t' th' tunnel after Kansas."

"No ye ain't," impatiently from Jean. "Ye're goin' t' stay here. He's too busy to bother with ye, I told ye."

Ross, also, was disappointed not to see Kansas, but he said nothing, and gave his attention to Rodrigo.

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The latter was much improved and was sitting up in his bunk propped up with blankets. His fever was gone, and his arm was healing nicely. After Ross had bandaged it again he picked up his supplies, pocketed them and turned away, saying :

" I'll come one more day, and then he can come over to the office. Dr. Scudder is back, and he'll see if everything is all right. Probably the doctor can come over to-morrow with me." He said it with many misgivings.

" Back, is he—as soon as this ? " asked Jean carelessly, but the form of the question showed Ross that the other must have received information of previous and longer trips made by the doctor out of the mountains.

Jean walked with the two past the tunnel, resisting Mucker's renewed importunities to see Kansas, and then stood on top of the dump and watched the two out of sight around the end of the ledge.

Arriving at the trail over the dump of Seven, Ross mounted it, followed by a stumbling, whimpering Mucker, and called loudly for Dad. No one answered, and Ross, still calling, entered the tunnel. He stumbled along the dripping passageway with its walls of alternating rock and timber until the darkness prevented his further passage. Then he retraced his steps, picking his way

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through the muck that covered the floor of the tunnel.

He was disappointed at not finding Dad. There were many things he wanted to talk over with the older man, among them Dr. Scudder, and his weaknesses. It did not seem credible to the boy that a man who had reached such a height in his profession as the doctor should allow a deliberately acquired habit to pull him into the ditch. He swung along down the cañon, his pulses tingling with the health and strength that right living and right thinking bring to any boy, and the thought of the doctor was a contemptuous thought.

"It's beyond me," he told himself, "how any one can lie down in a ditch in the mud when he might be the fellow up on the bank in the sunshine! I can't understand it. With his knowledge of medicine he ought to have known when he was taking a dose to steady up his hand for an operation that he was laying the rails that would run him into the ditch—but," tolerantly, "I don't suppose he was thinking about laying any rails—wasn't doing much thinking, I presume, beyond the fact that he wanted to take on more work than he had natural strength to do."

Suddenly Ross stopped so short that Mucker,

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treading silently on his heels, bumped against him and began to whimper. The Book of Forgetfulness seemed to Ross to have arisen in the trail and smote him in the face. The blood flamed to his forehead. He had not laid the foundation for future dissipations during the last year, it was true, but he had—by not thinking—laid the rails of carelessness and forgetfulness which might ditch him any day.

“In fact,” he told the uncomprehending Mucker, “that matter of the Dobell’s tablets, now—that’s a fair sample of what I was in the way of doing more than once. Such work wouldn’t make a sot of me, but it would make me as useless as Scudder.”

He walked on more slowly. Of course, if the doctor could have seen the ditch in his first dose of morphine he never would have taken it. Perhaps a dozen people had warned him, but because he did not see for himself the possible end—did not realize it—he had paid no attention to the dozen—“Except probably,” thought Ross, “to wish they’d keep their notions to themselves, just as I did at first about father’s harping on my forgetfulness.”

As soon as he reached the shack on the ledge he went to his room, took the Book of Forgetfulness from the shelf and looked at it with a new respect.

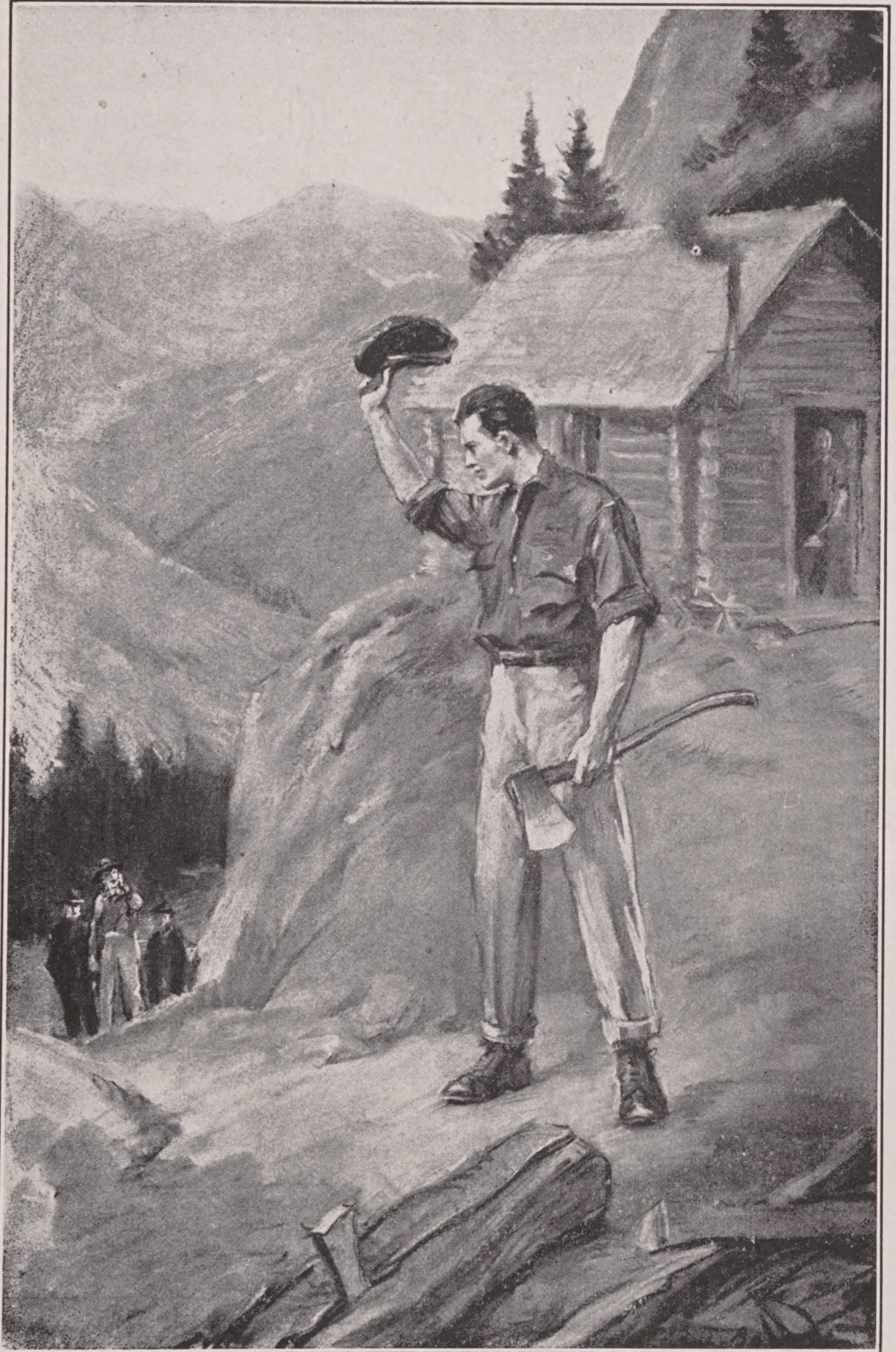
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That stood for his particular weakness, and some one else might regard that weakness some time with the same contempt he had been giving Dr. Scudder's. Some one might be saying, "Grant would be a first-class surgeon if only he had his wits about him!"

He stood looking down at the thin book as though it alone had been the source of an inspiration, whereas the interview with the doctor and the vividness of the impression centering about that interview, together with the application to his own growing habit of carelessness, had focussed his thoughts sharply on the fact that success in life means self-control to a high degree along every line coupled with the development of every faculty.

Replacing the book on the shelf, he left the room slowly and going back to the office again tried Dr. Scudder's door, but this time with an absence of impatience and contempt. There was no response to his calls, nor, later, to Hank's summons to supper, and neither made any further attempt that night to arouse the physician.

The following morning the doctor appeared at breakfast time, but he was not the man of yesterday. Around him was that wall of silence, of aloofness which had the power to keep Ross silent. There was also the actual distaste for food which



HE LOOKED DOWN ON THE FIRST ARRIVALS

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marks the victim of morphine, and the unsteadiness of the hand and muscles of the face.

After breakfast the man retired to his room, leaving the door open. He sat a long time beside his table writing, while Ross sat in the office pretending to read, but really trying to gain courage enough to refer to the conversation of the previous evening and again urge the other to "quit." While he was cudgeling his brain for a tactful beginning, the doctor arose abruptly and closed the door. When Ross heard the key click he drew a long breath and went out on the ledge, disgusted with himself and the wits that had refused to come to his rescue.

Presently voices from the cañon reached him, and going to the edge of the ledge he looked down on the first arrivals from Meeteetse, Kansas' Mexican employees. They toiled up the cañon laughing and gesticulating, disappearing more quickly from sight than sound. An hour later came the rumble and creak of wagons and Sims' freighter outfit came in sight and dropped the Gales Ridge men at the foot of the trail up the mountainside. They did not seem so gay as the Mexicans. They came toiling heavily upward as though the ascent were more of an exertion than usual. The reason was plainly written in the bearing of many, in their reddened faces and unsteady walk. Seeing Ross

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standing on the ledge, his hands in his pockets, they greeted him with a heartiness varying according to the energy each had retained after forty-eight hours in town.

"How does it come you're all back before the upper camp men?" Ross called to Harve who was the last to pass the end of the ledge.

Harve stopped, removed his sombrero and passed a hand across his aching head.

"Foreman made us come," he explained. "We've got t' git in the shift to-night and go t' work. Th' upper camp is still in Meeteetse doin' th' sights of th' city!"

Ross nodded and turned his attention to a group of new arrivals. They were Dad's men, all Americans, plodding along the stage trail wearily. When the foremost reached the trail leading up the side of Gales Ridge, he cupped his hands about his mouth and shouted up at Ross, "Hey, Doc Tenderfoot! Is Dad up there?"

It was a question that Ross never answered. Scarcely had the words left the man's mouth when from Dundee, high up under the eaves of the towering peak, came such a roar as had never before disturbed the silence of the mountains. It seemed to rend the sky and fill the cañon with terror. It surged back and forth, an ocean of mighty sound which broke against the peaks only to be hurled

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back in bursting echoes from the opposite ridges, while great boulders were lifted into sight against the sky-line and came hurtling down the side of Dundee, leaping from point to point, bearing down trees and uprooting mighty rocks.

CHAPTER XI

A MYSTERIOUS "GET-AWAY"

Ross, confused and appalled, watched the boulders bounding down the side of Dundee while the thunder of the explosion rolled away among the distant peaks. What had happened? The question was not answered at once. There succeeded a silence that was oppressive and full of breathless waiting. The men below stood as though frozen in their tracks, their faces turned up toward the disturbed heights.

"What is it?" Ross muttered aloud stupidly. "What's broken loose up there?"

One of the men below turned back toward the ridge, cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled slowly and clearly, "Which—is—it?"

Ross looked down at him blankly, and returned the yell: "Which—what d'ye mean by 'which'?"

The man made no reply, and Ross saw the question had been directed far above him to some one on the side of the ridge. But it took only an instant's thought to answer his own inquiry: the explosion must have come from either Seven or

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Eight, as those two were the only claims on Dundee having enough dynamite on hand to make so terrific an explosion.

The man in the cañon repeated his question in the single long-drawn shout of "W-h-i-c-h?"

It was answered from above by a frantic cry, "It's Seven, boys. Seven's blowed up!"

At this there was a murmur of voices from below and above, a murmur swelling rapidly into angry and menacing yells as man after man raced past the ledge from the tunnel high up on the side of Gales Ridge. They did not bother to follow the trail, but leaped from rock to rock, pitching down the steep slopes, shouting hoarse, disjointed sentences that turned Ross's heart cold. He stood watching this human stream flowing past without feeling enough power of locomotion to join it. Boots, he saw, was carrying a rifle in one hand and in the other a field-glass, which he waved at Dad's men below, shouting:

"I could see Eight from up yon and it ain't teched, so it's got to be Seven that's gone."

"Kansas'll go up too when we git there!" came another voice, its owner buckling his gun belt more tightly about him as he ran.

This remark galvanized Ross into action, and he joined the mad race for Dundee. Kansas! It couldn't be that Kansas would blow up Seven.

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The boy thought of the conversation he had overheard the night he took care of Rodrigo, speculation as to what would happen if a match were touched to the powder house of Seven.

"It can't be the work of Kansas!" he told himself, but his heart choked him.

Out of the confusion of tongues ahead scraps of remarks reached him.

"Dad's men wa'n't back ——"

"Kansas' men was—the dirty coward ——"

"—— a put up job ——"

"—— course his Greasers didn't ——"

"It's a job more'n one party can help along!"

On reaching the cañon the men automatically gave first place to Boots, who still clutched his field-glass and rifle. He had not stopped to buckle on his cartridge belt. On his heels trod his faithful follower, Harve. Ross pushed well to the front, falling in just behind Harve, intent on hearing anything that Boots might offer. He knew that anything said by Boots went with that crowd. But Boots, small, wiry, active, was setting a difficult pace at a half run, his head down, his fingers tense on rifle and glass. He was leaving all speech to his followers. The race and the excitement, however, admitted of but little conversation. Disjointed remarks only were tossed about between labored breaths, and every remark pointed to but

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one explanation of the explosion : that Kansas had blown up Dad's powder house with its recently acquired store of dynamite. Every one except Ross believed this as firmly as though he had seen it done. It was the only plausible theory. There was no one else on Dundee beside Dad, in the first place, except the outfit in Eight, while the feud between Seven and Eight furnished indisputable proof of the guilt of Kansas. In fact, one of the men declared agitatedly that he had wondered "time 'n' time again why Kansas hadn't teched a match before t' Dad's powder house !"

"Because," grunted a man behind the speaker, "because he knew that match would finish 'im fer these mountings even if he got away from us with his life !"

"Which he won't !" panted some one else, sprinting forward to a place beside Boots. "We'll comb th' peaks fer 'im !"

Ross, running half bent, with arms crooked at the elbows and fists doubled, gasped out to Harve, "Why—did he do it—then ?"

"What d'ye mean ?"

Ross explained with difficulty : "If Kansas had nothing to gain—and—everything to lose—by blowing up Seven—what makes you think he ——" His breath gave out at this point.

Harve did not answer, but Boots did. He

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spoke for the first time and the explanation was passed back from mouth to mouth. It satisfied every one save Ross.

"See here! Can't ye figger out Kansas? Wall, I can, easy. He's likely come t' th' end of the lead in his tunnel. Th' vein of ore is likely pinched out. He sees it's no good any longer to stick to Eight. He's got t' git out anyway, and before he goes he jest steps over t' Seven, sees the vein there is a-turnin' off good ore. That mads 'im and he blows Seven up jest t' say good-bye t' Dad—and us. Bound t' come out ahead, ye see—that's Kansas!"

This explanation dismayed Ross. He thought of the excitement in the tunnel the morning he was on Eight. If Boots' theory as to the vein pinching out was correct, it would account for Jean's conduct that morning he emerged from the tunnel just after the putting of a shot. He had been very much disturbed and it was very possible that this shot had exposed the end of the vein of good ore—that the vein, in mining terms, had "pinched out."

The part of Boots' explanation, however, that connected Kansas with disaster to Seven, the boy repudiated. Still, he had to acknowledge that, under the circumstances, the case against the owner of Eight looked dark.

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"Which way d'ye s'pose they're hikin'?" panted Harve, addressing Boots.

"Which way?" repeated Ross, laboring along just behind. "Who?"

Harve explained briefly but patiently. He considered Ross a competent surgeon, but only a tenderfoot boy when it came to the ways of mountains.

"Why, Doc, ye don't expect t' find th' Browns a-settin' on Dundee hangin' their hoofs off, d' ye? Ye bet they're hittin' a tall hike out of this here kentry, and don't ye fergit it!"

"Oh!" muttered Ross blankly and fell silent a moment. Then he ventured hesitatingly, "Dad—where's Dad?"

"I'm lookin' out t' see 'im every minute," Boots replied. "But mebbe Dad's takin' after 'em. It 'ud be like 'im—with a good gun."

From these, and similar remarks which reached him from the rear, Ross found that while the crowd did not expect to find Kansas at the end of their journey, they did expect to see Dad. They assumed that Kansas had chosen a time for the explosion when Dad was away from his tunnel. They began the ascent of Dundee without suspecting a deeper tragedy.

The swiftness of their ascent soon left Ross in the rear. He had not been long enough in the

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rare atmosphere of the mountains to become acclimated. His heart beat like a drum and his breath came in gasps, panic-stricken gasps they were when he noticed, for the first time, that every one of the twenty-six men ahead of him was armed.

"I wish," he said suddenly and vehemently, "that Dad would meet us; where can he be?"

The question was asked by others as they approached the shoulder of the mountain that hid the dump of Seven—asked but not answered by the anticipated appearance of Dad. Suspicion as to his fate was seeping through the crowd when Boots and Harve passed around the shoulder of rock and looked up at Seven. They gave a loud cry and stood still, but the rest of the men, pushing forward, crowded them along on the narrow trail until every one could view the wreck which had altered the face of that part of the mountain.

The mouth of the tunnel, the bunk house, eating shack and powder house were wiped out, and in their place lay thousands of tons of débris. The overhanging mountain had sloughed off and piled its rocks, its dirt and its torn, uprooted trees over Seven. The explosion had caused a great landslide that had filled in over the dump, forming an inclined plane to the top of the ledge that had but

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a few hours before raised its head fifty feet above the mouth of the tunnel.

For an instant the men crowded together and looked up in silent awe at this mighty upheaval. Ross was the first to recover the use of his voice. Filling his lungs he cupped his hands about his mouth and sent up against the wreck a stentorian cry of "Dad—Ho-o-o—Dad!"

The long-drawn breaths about him sounded like the gentle sigh of a breeze. The shout broke the spell which had held the men soundless and motionless. They moved, and shading their eyes with their hands, looked up eagerly.

"There he comes!" cried Harve. "There's Dad!"

They all saw a figure making its way slowly over the twisted tree trunks, and around the boulders, breaking through the surface occasionally where a covering of dirt had been flung over the tops of the fallen spruces.

"Why," muttered Boots stupidly, "that ain't Dad."

A second figure arose out of the débris and followed the first. Then heads appeared here and there, as their owners arose from holes and crevices over the original location of the mouth of Seven.

The men below stared in silent bewilderment

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until the approaching figures came near enough to be recognized. Then Ross shouted joyfully: "Why, boys, it's Jean Brown—and Kansas is behind him. They haven't run away!"

His joy, which was short lived, was the outcome of the explanation detailed by Harve. The Browns had not run away, therefore they were not guilty of blowing up Seven.

Jean stopped within ear-shot and leaning over a tree trunk yelled, "We—can't—find—hide—ner—hair—of—Dad. He's—likely buried!"

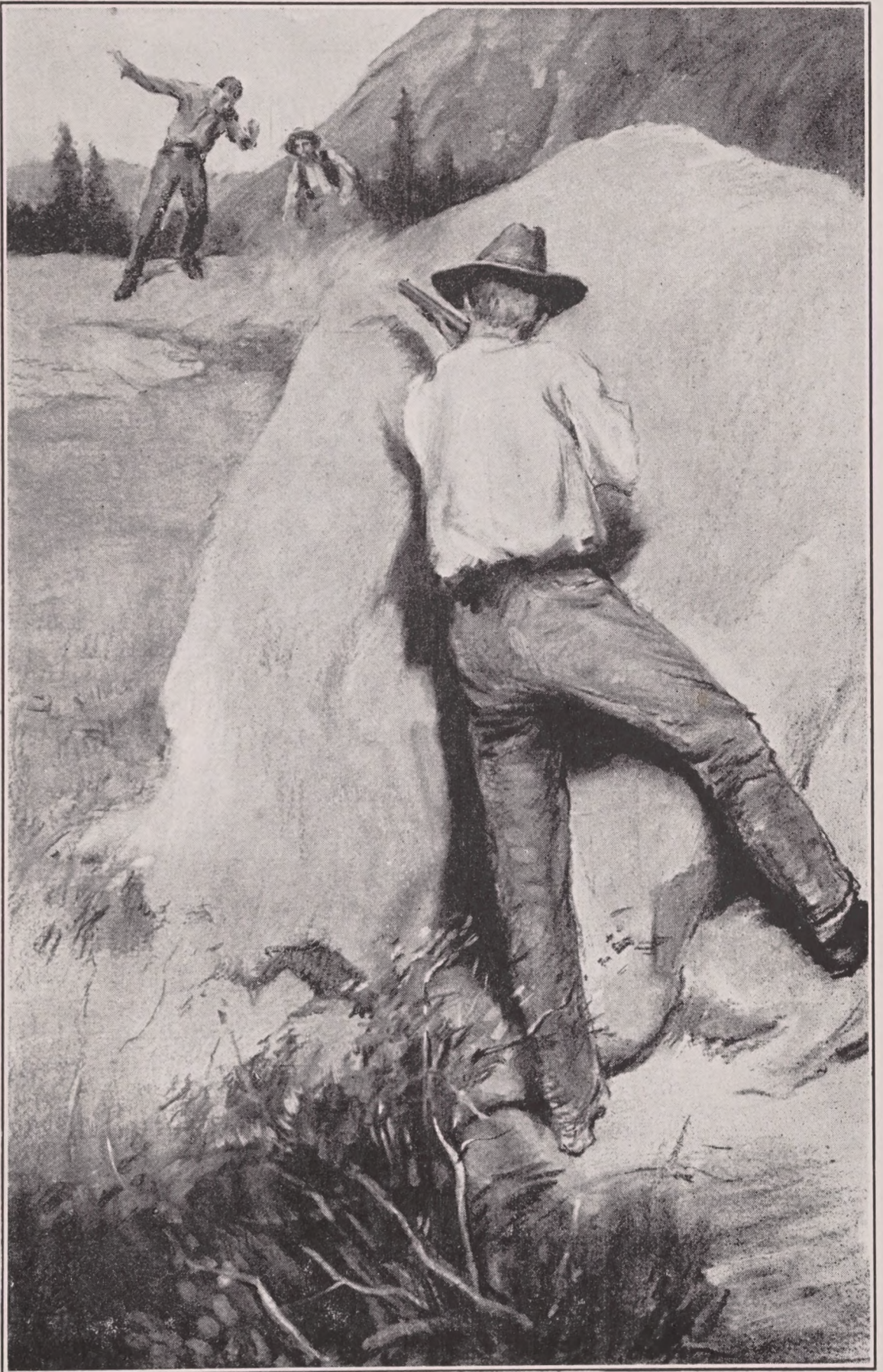
"Dad buried!" cried Harve. "Dad buried! Then ——"

The remainder of his sentence was drowned in a mighty roar of rage, the outburst of the suspicion which had been budding on the way up the Dundee trail. Above the uproar could be heard the voice of Boots.

"Murderers!" he shrieked. "Murderers and wreckers!" He turned on his followers. "Boys, look at 'em! Sneaks—cowards—murderers! Are ye goin' t' let 'em git away, boys?"

He whirled and, raising his rifle, fired at Jean who, unharmed, stood on the tree trunk and waving his arms frantically tried to make the furious crowd listen, but they would not.

"Hear him," yelled Ross, pushing among the frenzied men. "Let's listen to him—let's ——"



HE REELED BACKWARD

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"Listen to a murderer!" shrieked some one in front. "Down with him, I say!"

Boots fired again, and Jean's outstretched right arm fell helpless. He reeled backward and Kansas caught him. He was on his feet again instantly, and with his brother began to run back over the débris, followed by the Mexicans who scuttled out of the holes where they had either been hiding or digging. They sprang from cover to cover to escape the bullets from the rifle Boots was discharging amid a pandemonium of yells and revolver shots from the trail.

As the last bullet left his gun, Boots dropped the butt on the trail and turned on the group with an order which rang out over the confusion and spelled instant action.

"Head 'em off, boys. Don't ye see what they're doin'? They can't git off Dundee except to go back this way—right above us here," pointing up at right angles to the trail. "We can git 'em as they go. Climb, boys! Hike up there and git 'em!"

"Don't you see that Kansas didn't do this?" Ross shrieked, laying hold of the men nearest him. "If he had done it he would have run away before. You've said so yourselves! Listen!"

But the men would not listen—did not even hear. They pushed the speaker aside, unconscious

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even of his presence, so intent were they on carrying out their leader's orders. Straight up the steep side of the mountain they climbed, clinging to roots and rocks like squirrels to the bark of a tree, ominously quiet now and ominously active.

Ross, helpless and baffled, stood on the trail and watched them climb, watched their faces from which hate and excitement had blotted out reason and pity and justice. A feeling of faintness and nausea assailed him. He was well enough acquainted with the topography of this part of Dundee to understand the movements of the Gales Ridge men.

There was only one way in which the men on the wreck could readily escape, and that was by making their way, as Boots had pointed out, across the path of their climbing enemies. They could not get away quickly over the top of the mountain because they would be met by a cliff nearly perpendicular. They could not flee down the mountainside because the trail on which Ross stood followed a narrow shelf with a drop of thirty feet below, while to go back over Dundee Ledge into the vicinity of Eight was to put themselves into a trap from which escape would be the work of a long and unhurried time.

Boots, collected now, and resourceful, stood on the trail ahead of Ross directing the movements

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of his men. To one he yelled an order to stay where he was, to others to climb right or left or advance. Ross saw with a sinking heart that under his directions there would be a line-up across the pathway of the Browns which would leave them no chance to slip through, especially since Jean had a broken right arm and the Gales Ridge men were all armed. Then he scanned the wreck anxiously. There was no one in sight, but that was not strange, as there was plenty of débris to screen the party. He watched until his head swam. Then suddenly he gave a stifled exclamation. It was echoed by Boots, who at the same moment had caught a glimpse of an unexpected movement on the part of the Browns. They were not fleeing in the direction in which they were expected, but back toward the ledge—back into the trap afforded by the neighborhood of Eight.

"Boys, hold!" Boots yelled at his followers. "They ain't comin' that way. They've jest gone back over the ledge."

The Gales Ridge men struggled upright, clinging to brush and rock, and craned their heads toward the ledge, silent with astonishment as the outfit from Eight, led by Jean and Kansas, struggled up to the summit of the distant ledge and disappeared over its further edge like rabbits scurrying into a hole. Several of the Gales Ridge

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men discharged their guns, but the fugitives were out of range of small weapons and Boots had emptied his rifle.

He dropped it now on the trail, together with the field-glass, and taking off his cap pushed his hair back from his forehead, his face wearing an expression of frowning bewilderment. Six of his men slid down the mountainside and joined him. Those higher up clung, waiting his command.

"Hurry!" urged Harve, the first to reach Boots. "Don't ye see? We've got 'em in a trap now. They can't get away."

Boots' scowl deepened. "Don't ye see that they've got us first?" he exploded. "If Kansas has got a rifle an' can use it ——" the rest of the explanation Ross lost, also much of the parley that followed. At its close Boots yelled hurried directions to the men above him to close in on the ledge, but to keep under cover there.

"Kansas must be aimin' t' pick us off on th' ledge," he shouted, "so look alive fer yerselves."

Then, paying no attention to Ross, the leader started for the ledge, followed by the six men who had joined him. The boy was thankful that he did not count in their plans. To them he was only a badly winded young tenderfoot, a "cracker-jack" in surgery, but no good in a chase of this kind. They did not mind having him tag along,

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believing him to be with them in sympathy. The fact that they did think him with them hand-in-glove struck him now as a good thing in case he found a way to help Kansas—and never had he so keenly felt the need of being able to make the most of his wits.

The trail around the end of the ledge was choked by the wreck and the only way into Eight was up over the ledge by the path Kansas' men had taken. To Ross it was a difficult path. He pulled himself up by the branches of fallen trees, he stumbled into holes, he climbed gingerly over precariously balanced boulders, and pitched head-long over tree trunks. He bruised himself cruelly without realizing any pain, so full of suspense and terror was the situation. The suspense as to the fate of the Browns also dulled the realization of Dad's fate—fine old Dad. He did not stop to think that somewhere beneath all this tangle lay Dad.

He was the last to struggle up to the top of the ledge, where he found Boots' party screening themselves behind the huge rock which, in Razorback Jones' survey, was responsible in the first place for the tragedy being enacted around it. Ross leaning, trembling, against the rock had no room in his thoughts for Razorback or the futility of his efforts now to get hold of the surveyor.

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His attention was centered breathlessly on Boots dragging himself prone across the ledge until he reached the outer edge. Here he raised his head cautiously and looked down on Eight. After a protracted survey he raised boldly to his knees. At this Harve caught his breath in fear. "Kansas'll git 'im if he ain't careful!"

As though in reply, Boots stood up.

Again Harve gasped, this time in amazement: "Say, boys, it can't be that Kansas ain't watchin' t' pick us off when we show ourselves on top here! Why—it's his only chance in that trap!"

"Come on, boys," called Boots. "Ain't no one in sight. Up yon is where they got down t' th' dump of Eight. Come on. We'll smoke 'em out, wherever they're hidin'."

Ross followed to the edge of the ledge and looked down. Eight lay fifty feet below them uninjured, for the ledge running like a spine up Dundee had protected the side opposite Seven from the landslide following the explosion. There was neither sign nor sound of the Browns. Ross could see the dark empty mouth of the tunnel, the deserted eating shack and the empty bunk house—but at this thought his heart gave a sudden lurch. The bunk house must have at least one occupant—Rodrigo. The Mexican was too ill to join in any attempt to escape such as was evidently being at-

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tempted by the rest. Rodrigo was his patient. He must stand by the sick Mexican. Still, it was not likely that the men would pay any attention to a helpless Greaser, bent as they were on finding the Browns.

"Where be they—eh?" muttered Harve.

"Fixin' t' make a stand some'ers," briefly from Boots. "Shouldn't be surprised if they're in the tunnel. They may figger they can hold us off there. Here, Fatty," to a man next him, "my rifle's left behind—no more cartridges. Let's have your gun and I'll cover the tunnel while you boys go down."

A way down was made by a seam in the ledge sloping downward to the dump with, to Ross, nerve-racking abruptness. The others, accustomed to mountain climbing, descended rapidly, but he made but slow and painful progress, finding a toe hold in the seam and hand holds in the crevices above or the bushes that had taken root in the seams.

He had not attempted the descent until the impatient Boots was down and when he finally reached the dump he found the party with guns drawn screened behind the empty grub shack while Boots boldly crept toward the dark mouth of the tunnel, a place easy to hold against the besiegers.

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Ross, without awaiting the result of Boots' move, crossed the dump hastily and entered the bunk house in search of his patient. "Rodrigo," he began in a tone intended to be reassuring, and then stopped abruptly.

The Mexican was not there. His blankets were, however, and Ross slipped his hand between them. They were as warm as though their occupant had been there but a moment before.

Ross looked about bewildered. The bunk house was in its usual disorder. He went from bunk to bunk lifting the blankets, but none of them covered Rodrigo. He stepped to the door. Boots was creeping into the tunnel on his hands and knees. One of the men behind the grub shack, seeing Ross, motioned to him. Ross shook his head and answered aloud:

"There's no one here, not even the sick Mexican."

Boots, at the entrance of the tunnel, discharged his gun within rapidly with the aim of "smoking out" the supposed defenders, but beyond the echo from his gun there was no sound, and he disappeared into the opening with less caution. He had been gone but a few moments before he came running out crying in amazement:

"Boys, they ain't here—not a sign of 'em. Scatter now and beat up the place. Fire once when

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you strike their trail." His tone was perplexed, his face puzzled.

Ross wordlessly followed the leader, who at once made a rapid circuit around the edges of the trap, leaving the others to beat up the forest of spruce and pine that covered the mountainside. He hurried below first to the trail which lay intact from the foot of the ledge out. Ross stumbled along behind, his own amazement growing momentarily as the shouts of the other members of the party showed that no one had come on the Browns.

"Where have they gone?" Boots exclaimed again and again as he surveyed the formidable barriers Nature had planted against their escape.

The lower edge of the trap was a shelf below which was a fall of some thirty feet ending in a mass of bushes and sharp-edged rocks. A man might drop off this shelf at points and risk his life and limb, but at no point was there a sign that such a drop had been made.

A quarter of a mile beyond the ledge the searchers came to the second side of the trap, a sheer, impassable descent into a gorge, the bed of Dundee Creek, parallel to the ledge. Ross shuddered and drew back from the brink along which Boots hurried without a shiver.

"Not a sign of 'em here," yelled Boots to his in-

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visible posse in the woods, "and this is the side they couldn't make, anyway."

Panting in his efforts to keep up with Boots, Ross followed him along the third side of the trap, the precipitous ascent to the peak above the dump and at right angles to the ledge. This ascent had been swept clear of hand holds by innumerable landslides. A man might climb here to safety, but it would take time and patience—and but scant time had been allowed to the pursued.

Boots, bending, scanned the ground carefully. He searched the slope also with eager eyes, but no footmarks of an ascent appeared. "Has the ground opened under 'em?" Boots demanded as they came at last to the ledge, the fourth boundary of the trap, along the top of which Gales Ridge men had placed themselves near enough together so that it was impossible for one man, not to mention a dozen, to climb over the ledge unseen. Besides, there were only a few places along its sides where a foothold could be obtained for climbing.

Ross left Boots and returned to the dump utterly bewildered. "The ground must have swallowed 'em!" he exclaimed aloud, sitting down on a section of tree trunk.

He dropped his face on his hands and sat thinking. He tried to go calmly over the events connected with the catastrophe. Suddenly he thought

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of Boots' explanation of a possible motive for the wrecking of Seven—provided Kansas was the wrecker—in the pinching out of the vein of ore in Eight. Going into the tunnel, he made his way to the end, striking matches to show him the way when daylight failed. The tunnel was like all the others on the mountains. There were the same intervals of timbering, the same lengths of solid rock walls, the same incessant drip from the top, the same sucking mud on the floor. At the end Ross found the *débris* from the last shot only partly removed, and remembered that the day before the Fourth Kansas and the day shift had put in the time cutting trees for timbering. By the dim light of his matches he filled his pockets with specimens of ore from the *débris* made by this last shot.

One by one the baffled pursuers came back to the dump. They could not credit the escape of twelve men, one of whom was wounded and one sick. They stood around looking at each other stupidly awaiting Boots, who was the last to give up the search.

“We've looked behind every tree and rock in the hull place,” declared Harve, “and hain't found even the track of one of their hoofs. It ain't—ain't—well—nateral!”

A note of awe crept into his voice and a mo-

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ment later he wandered off toward a low big shack where stood thirty or more from the dump and on a lower level. It was the powder house of Eight.

When Boots arrived, Ross produced the ore from his pockets and handed it over for inspection. "You remember what you said," he explained, "about the vein pinching out. I'm no judge of ore, and so I brought it out for you to see. I picked it up just where it had fallen from the last shot."

The men crowded around Boots. They were all seasoned miners, accustomed to judging ore at sight.

"Boys," exclaimed Boots, "I'll be hanged if this ain't better stuff than Dad's tunnel ever showed. No, the vein here is fur from pinchin' out, accordin' to this!"

He dropped the ore and stood thinking, but before he could bring reason to bear on this fresh undermining of the props of Kansas' guilt, he was swept off his feet by a yell from Harve.

Harve was dragging a case of dynamite from the powder house, shrieking, "Come on, boys! Come on!"

Every one sprang to his assistance save Ross. Every one understood his action except the boy left on the dump. All Ross could think of at first

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was that the Browns were hiding in the powder house. He did not comprehend what was going on until the boxes of dynamite were being carried up on the dump and into the eating shack and bunk house, but principally into the mouth of the tunnel.

"Come, Doc," Boots called as the last box was dragged up on the dump. "Git yerself over the ledge, fer Eight is goin' up in jest ten minutes."

"Yeh, Doc!" shouted Harve. "Blowin' up tunnels is a game that more'n one can play at."

It was useless to protest against the destruction, and Ross lost no time in drawing himself up to the top of the ledge, followed by every one except Boots, the spryest man among them. Boots touched a match to the end of a long, carefully laid fuse and leaped to the foot of the ledge. He climbed for his life up the narrow projection and half a dozen hands reached down from the top to aid him. He had barely reached the top when once more the air was split by a terrific explosion, the mountain trembled, and chaos reigned on Dundee Eight.

CHAPTER XII

THE SON OF DAD'S PARTNER

THE Gales Ridge outfit regretted that there was not enough dynamite available to wreck Eight as completely as Seven. There was sufficient, however, to destroy the shacks and bring that section of the mountainside overhanging the mouth of the tunnel down over the dump in a vast, roaring, sliding heap which buried the tunnel deeply enough to make it a fitting companion piece to Seven.

Ross, sick at heart, stood on the ledge and watched this landslide hurtling past at his feet, grinding huge boulders to pieces and snapping the trunks of trees as though they were matches. He saw the results of months of work blotted out in a moment by this moving, remorseless mass.

"There ye be!" shouted Boots when he could be heard. "That suits me s' fer as it goes!"

"But it don't go far enough," came an answering shout, "when it don't reach Kansas."

The men surrounded their leader, the pickets from the ledge gathering in to hear the details of the hunt for the missing men, and have verified the

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incredible fact that no trace of them could be found.

"I don't exactly believe it's a miracle," Harve protested with a note of reluctant awe in his voice. "But we seen 'em all pilin' over this ledge, and int' the worst trap I ever found, and they ain't in it now."

"Kansas likely had the way out all fixed up before he done this," Fatty suggested. "He likely had his trail picked and his grub hid 'n' all that. He was probably all ready fer us."

"But," exclaimed Harve incredulously, "ye can't pick a way out of a hole like that," pointing out over Eight, "without showing at least by a toe mark where ye've gone, and the toe mark ain't there."

"Neither," Fatty retorted, "is the men, and yet ye seen 'em yerself go over there. So they've got out somehow!"

"But where—how?" reiterated a dozen voices helplessly.

Fatty shook his head. "If I knew I'd be follerin' hot-foot!"

"That ore Doc brought out of Eight bothers me some," hesitated another voice in the rear of the group. "If the vein had pinched out like Boots said up the cañon it would account fer Kansas doin' this, but ——"

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Boots interrupted authoritatively: "See here, boys, I figger that this way now: Kansas seen the vein was gittin' richer and richer and that the intersection would give a rich passel of ore, and Dad was nearer the intersection nor he was. So he done fer Dad, cal'latin' to git clear of the mountings scot free and then sell out big to some one he has in mind, thinkin' that we wouldn't and couldn't hender a stranger from takin' possession of Eight and goin' on with the work. In this way Kansas wouldn't stand t' lose anything on his claim. See?"

The crowd saw, and a dozen furious voices made response. No stranger, the men swore, should ever uncover Eight. It should lie unworked so long as one of them remained in the mountains. Kansas should not be allowed to profit by his crime. Dundee Eight had been sealed by the landslide—and would remain sealed!

Boots brought these protests to a close by an urge to action. The boulders were yet loosening from the steep surface above Eight and hurtling downward. The pursuit, the search and the destruction of Eight had occupied only a short half hour.

"Boys," Boots' voice rang out in renewed determination, "I hain't give up findin' 'em. No matter how they got out they hain't hiked far. Now

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let's divide up 'n' beat up these mountings 'til not a pack rat could get away from us—and let's do it now."

Ross had been looking out over the wreck of Seven. Relieved by the failure to find Kansas his thoughts were turning vividly to Dad's fate. He was dismayed at the men's intention of hunting down the Browns before attempting to rescue Dad.

"See here," he cried hoarsely, "what about Dad? Fellows, have you all forgotten Dad?"

He attempted to force his way into the crowd gathering around Boots, but as the latter was speaking rapidly, no one answered the boy or gave place to him. He swallowed hard and persisted, although with the natural diffidence that marred his forcefulness. He shouldered his way forward until he reached Boots.

"Say!" he urged stammeringly. "Say, see here! What about Dad? I'll dig—I'll—who's going to get under that mess—and there's Nicholas. We've got to get Dad out for Nick ——" he could not go on.

Boots stopped speaking. For an instant the mob spirit died out of his eyes. He too looked out over the greater wreck as over the burial place of a comrade. Then in a subdued voice he answered reluctantly while the men involuntarily drew back and stood with bowed heads:

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"Doc, it 'ull take days fer *that*, and a deal of head-work—and anyway, it'll be too late fer Dad. A few hours one way 'r t'other won't matter to him—now. But"—here his voice rang out angrily—"to his murderers it makes a heap o' difference, and we'll find 'em if they're t' be found."

Heads came up with a jerk, and a wave of angry assent met the declaration. The men closed in again, crowding out the one useless member, and Ross found himself unheard and unnoticed on the outskirts of the group. Disheartened and helpless, he started for Gales Ridge. As he picked his way above Seven he was stabbed at every step by the belief that Dad lay somewhere beneath his feet. When he reached the trail he flung himself down, and resting his face on his curved arms, struggled with himself. Boots was right! a few hours' delay in commencing to uncover the mouth of the tunnel at Seven made no difference to Dad—now. But there was his adopted son to be considered. Poor Nick! No son could think more of a father.

Presently Ross rose to a sitting posture and, with his arms clasping his knees, began to argue himself into a state of hopefulness. It was all guess-work, he told himself, about Dad's whereabouts. He might be even then over at the office on Gales

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Ridge. Or he might have gone over the mountain on some errand—where, Ross did not care to attempt to explain, knowing that the nearest neighbor outside of camp was five or six hours away. In his heart the boy knew that Dad would remain on guard near his tunnel until his men returned, but it might be he was not near enough the dump at the time of the explosion to be injured.

Resolutely fighting back the assumption that if he were near enough to hear the explosion and was uninjured he would be on hand now, Ross descended the trail slowly. He paused at the shoulder of the mountain where the first glimpse of Seven could be had. It was here he had come across Dad scanning the mountainside, hoping it would give up the secret of the mysterious explosion heard by his men in the tunnel on the morning of the third. Ross turned here also, longing to have the grim and towering rock mass give up not only the secret of Dad's whereabouts but that most baffling secret, the exit of twelve men from a trap which had been thought to have no exit. But Dundee frowned him down, and he turned again toward the cañon.

When he reached the rock where he had sat with Mucker two days before, he came across Mucker's father, who had fallen out of the race for Dundee. Wort sat slumped down on the rock, the

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adhesive plaster across his broken nose dirty, his eyes bloodshot, and his tripping tongue betraying the effect of recent indulgence.

"Wh-where's my boy?" asked Wort.

Ross stopped short; a startled exclamation escaped him. Sure enough, where was Mucker? He had disappeared—when? Ross passed his hand over his eyes. "I don't know, Wort. I've not seen Mucker since—since—breakfast. That's it. After breakfast, I sat down in the office—I didn't think of him, even."

He was speaking more to himself than to Wort. He remembered that his attention had been centered on the doctor and he had not once noticed the absence of the boy. "See here, Wort!" he exclaimed finally. "He's probably up at the office now, but you won't get him"—unconsciously adopting Mucker's expression. "He has a bad hand, and until it's healed he'll not go back to work, and until you sober up your boy stays with me in any case."

Wort began to weep. "He's m-my boy, not yours!" he protested, "and he's goin' t' muck s' we can e-eat. 'N' what's more you've s-stole—my satchel, and I—I w-want it."

"Well, you won't get it," Ross returned emphatically.

"I w-want it before the upper camp gits h-here,"

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insisted Wort. "I w-want t' b-brace up t' meet 'em!"

"The upper camp!" echoed Ross. He stood staring at Wort as at a ghost. He had not once thought of the upper camp, so engrossed had he been in the happenings on Dundee. He heard Wort speaking, but no longer heeded. Not one of the searchers had mentioned the absentees in his hearing. "I don't believe even Boots has thought of them," he told himself, "nor of what will happen when they get here. And what will happen?"

It was unanswerable, that question, with Seven wrecked over Dad and Eight also wrecked, with Kansas at large and the upper camp the friends of Kansas now fugitive and being hunted. He went slowly down the cañon, followed by Wort's voice, but the greater anxiety swallowed up for a time his sense of responsibility for Mucker or his anxiety over the boy's absence. If only Dad were there to take command of the situation. If only he could meet the older man with his burly stooping shoulders supporting the big head—the kind eyes——Ross choked and hurried up the Gales Ridge trail trying to persuade himself that he should see Dad in the office.

It was with a glow of foundationless hope that he rushed across the ledge and stopped in the doorway. But the glow instantly faded. The office

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was empty. The doctor's door was closed. Hank was washing dishes in the kitchen, working noisily, as unconscious as the doctor of the tragedy on Dundee. He had heard nothing, and, not having seen the rush down the side of Gales Ridge, his world was as yet undisturbed.

Ross caught up a piece of wrapping paper and scribbled a question on it. This he held in front of Hank. "Have you seen Dad this morning?"

Hank shook his head.

Ross wrote again. "Has the doctor been out of his room?"

Another shake.

Ross was leaving the kitchen when the thought of Mucker occurred to him, and again Hank shook his head at the question: "Have you seen Mucker since breakfast?"

Ross returned to the office and assaulted the doctor's door violently. He shook it and banged it, calling lustily for admittance. The only reply he received was a deep long breath that broke into a gurgling snore.

He backed into the middle of the room and burst out angrily: "Lying like that—with the camps facing such a crisis. And if a fight comes off and men are hurt—here I am ——"

He got his field-glass and, going out on the ledge, scanned the great mountain opposite, but it

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seemed devoid of human life. He sat down on the door stone, and for the first time since he had left the office and joined in the mad rush for Dundee, his thoughts traveled connectedly into the near future to meet the arrival of the men of the upper camp. They were probably now on their way from Meeteetse, and he could not believe that they had any previous knowledge of what was going to happen else they would be on hand when it did happen.

Now he asked himself, Would the shock of Dad's fate supposedly at the hands of Kansas turn them against the latter, or would the action of the Gales Ridge men in wrecking Eight arouse their anger and stimulate their partisanship?

In the latter case it would mean such a clash, or worse, as Dad had feared would take place on the Fourth. Ross thought of the temper of the Gales Ridge men, and their side arms, and shivered. He believed that if the upper camp were met by the right man in the right spirit, a clash could be averted, and that sympathy for Dad could be made to crowd out every feeling of animosity for the present at least. The crying need, then, was for a leader, a non-partisan, influential leader. There was just one man in Miners' who might have fulfilled every requirement, and he lay there on his bed, dead to every call of duty.

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No matter what opinion the miners might have of Dr. Scudder's habits, Ross had noticed the involuntary tribute of awe they paid him. The doctor, dignified and commanding, was the man to meet the upper camp, but there was, as his assistant knew, no hope of his acting.

The hours dragged. Ross threshed the matter out from every view-point he could command, save one. It remained for a sight of the thin and insignificant looking Book of Forgetfulness to present to him the very important view-point he had overlooked.

He had wandered restlessly into his room and stood before the shelf looking at the book as it lay under his comb, flanked by his hair-brush and tooth-brush. He thought of the entries concerning Razorback Jones. With Dad under the wreck of Seven, and Eight sealed by the edict of the Gales Ridge outfit, how futile to summon Razorback.

"One thing only I'm sure of," Ross said aloud, turning away, "I'll have no entries of carelessness to make in connection with this affair!"

Half-way across the kitchen he paused. No, he had been careless or forgetful in nothing connected with the affair, but was that all that the book stood for? He had forgotten nothing, but that, at best, was but negative. Was there not

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something positive that devolved on him in the matter? He fully realized his responsibility so far as his duties in the office were concerned. If the doctor was not able to answer any calls made on him, his assistant must be ready, but it had not occurred to him before that it might be possible for him to fill the doctor's place in an attempt to avert a crisis between the camps. The idea now caused him to smile sarcastically at himself as he passed out on the ledge.

"Who would listen to me?" he asked himself. "The Gales Ridge men hardly knew I was along to-day—except Boots. They sit up all right and take notice when I fix up a busted nose but, beyond such work, what good do they think I am here?"

Nevertheless, the idea grew on him, and its growth was quickened by the memory of his success in the matter of the letter to Kansas. It was also quickened by the recollection that it was Boots, the leader of the Gales Ridge men, who had given him a measure of attention in the midst of the excitement on Dundee.

Again and again he went over the situation, asking himself not whether it was possible for him to get the men to listen to him, but what he might say that would *compel* them to listen.

The question was unanswered when, late in the

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afternoon, the Gales Ridge men came trooping up the trail headed for their grub shack. They came on wearily, thoroughly sobered and unexcited, but filled with baffled anger. Ross went out beyond Wort's cabin and awaited them. He planted himself doggedly in the middle of the narrow trail, determined to stop them at least long enough to tell him what they had been doing. Again it was Boots who first recognized his presence respectfully.

His leading question was of Dad—and it voiced the remnant of a lingering hope.

Boots worried the trail with his toe as he answered: "No, Doc, 'course we hain't run on t' Dad. I guess you sort of expected"—he broke off and began action with the other toe—"I guess you think likely Dad'll turn up yet—but—Doc, don't ye hang t' no such idee. Dad's up yon," jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "He's done fer. One shift's goin' on the job of the diggin' as soon as we git some grub."

"Well"—Ross swallowed—"what of Kansas?"

Boots' toe ceased to worry the trail. His head came up with a jerk, and his nostrils distended angrily, but two deep furrows in his forehead showed his perplexity.

"Doc, I've run acrost some queer things in my day, but the rest was all mavericks alongside of

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this. We hain't run on hide ner hair of 'em—ner their trail."

" 'N' there was twelve of 'em t' leave a trail," muttered some one behind him.

" With one sick and one hit at that," added a third. " No easy travelin' fer them thet-a-way."

" Th' ground must 'a' opened up 'n' swallowed 'em," declared Harve, and into his voice crept the same note of awe it had contained when, on Dundee, he had spoken of miracles.

" They can't make a final git-away," declared Boots with angry conviction. " As soon as we've snatched a snack of grub Harve here is goin' t' ride back t' the valley and ask th' ranchmen to come 'nd help us—dig. And the first telephone he comes to he'll heat up considerable tellin' the sheriff at Basin what's been done 'nd puttin' 'im on the track of the Browns—th' sheriff'll overhaul 'em in th' state or out of it—Dad, ye know, was one of his deputies—and a mighty good one, was Dad."

" Ye see," Harve told Ross, " Kansas, he can't have grub along to last twelve men a great while. And we sent some of the fellers up to the upper camp t' see t' it they didn't git nothin' there."

" The upper camp!" cried Ross. " Some of our men in the upper camp? Why—why—how will the men there like that when they come back?"

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The group moved uneasily, and exchanged glances which were not lost on Ross.

Boots replied shortly, "If they don't like it they can lump it, that's all—takin' up as they have with a murderer!"

Ross's heart missed a beat. In the expressions before him lay the promise of an immediate clash with the upper camp—and Boots would be on hand to precipitate it, while Dr. Scudder would not be on hand either to curb it or to aid his assistant with the casualties. Suddenly an idea flashed into Ross's mind, the answer to the question he had been asking himself all the afternoon. The idea was a sort of a connecting link between the various chains of reasoning he had been following out so carefully. He cleared his throat and squared his shoulders. He pushed boldly into the center of the group and faced Boots, not as the diffident Doc Tenderfoot to whom, in the grave business of the day, the men had given but scant attention, but as the son of his father, the financial backer of the work on Seven.

"See here, men," he began with dogged determination, "I want you to listen to me. I have a right to be heard. There isn't one of you that has as much interest in this whole business as I have—because of my father."

He spoke to them all, but he did not take his

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eyes from Boots. The latter glanced up in surprise, and then stood with his head bent forward listening.

"My father," Ross continued with increasing confidence when he saw he had caught the attention of the leader, "has put the money into Seven that has pushed the work—and it's work which the rest of you were depending on."

He paused, looking hard at Boots.

Boots nodded, and the others followed his lead.

"You all seem to have caught on to why I'm here ——" Ross jerked this out, and glanced from one to another.

This point also impressed the men. Doc Tenderfoot surely had a right to be heard in the matter of Seven. They drew closer to him as he continued emphatically along one of the lines of reasoning he had worked out during the last anxious hours.

"Now let's suppose for a moment that Kansas did set off that dynamite ——"

"An' he did !" interrupted Boots positively.

Ross nodded, conceding the point for the sake of what he wanted to drive home. "Well, then it couldn't have been known to the upper camp what he was going to do to-day, or else they would have been on hand to take his part. The upper camp can't know a thing of what is happening

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here. And I bet when they find out they'll be as shocked as we are and as ready to help us with Dad ——"

At this there was a stir in the group both of assent and remonstrance. He raised his voice, and reiterated emphatically :

"I tell you if they knew that explosion had been coming off to-day and had approved of it they'd have been on hand, don't you know they would?" he appealed to Boots. "They wouldn't be stopping down in the valley for another dance! No-sir-ee! They'd be dancing up here, all right, to help Kansas."

Boots dragged off his cap and scratched his head. The others looked from him to Ross. Every one was awaiting his comment. Ross, noticing this, hurried on :

"Now see here," he urged, "what we want is to get that mess off of Seven and get Dad's—Dad's body out right quick. How do you know that he's not alive? Stranger things have happened. He may be in the tunnel so far back that he escaped the explosion, and there may be enough air to keep him alive. We mustn't let anything interfere with the opening of the tunnel. We must use every man. We've got to have more to work, men who know how to dig and have the equipment to dig, and the fellows of the upper camp would be a

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blamed sight more useful than a lot of ranchmen you'd bring in from the valley. Let them stay down there and—and hunt for the Browns if you think ——” He checked the doubt and hurried on: “We want the upper camp's help, and we can't have it if you fellows are going to act as though they are all as guilty as—as Kansas. If you don't let bygones be bygones with 'em until we get Seven uncovered the upper camp won't turn in and help. Neither would you if the case were reversed. But I don't believe that a man in the upper camp would refuse to help recover Dad's body if he were asked to help in a decent spirit. Now do you, fellows?”

The men stirred uneasily. Boots hesitated and frowned.

“And if you don't get their help,” Ross began again earnestly, “if we mix up in a fight with 'em now and let Dad lie there, what will the valley think of us—and what would we think of ourselves—to neglect Dad for a free-for-all fight? It would be an eternal blot on us!”

Boots looked at the ground. He looked across at Dundee. Then he looked earnestly at Ross. “Doc, I believe you're right—about the upper camp not knowin' and all the rest. Say, boys, this 's what we'll do. I'll ride back and meet the upper camp and explain. And if they'll help and

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agree not to feed Kansas if he's found lurkin' 'round here, why—Harve," he turned to his right hand man abruptly, "ye can go down and git a-holt of the sheriff. That's what we'd be obliged to do in any case. And," grimly, "we can let the rest of the job out to him safe s' far as the Browns is concerned. It don't look exactly decent, as Doc here says, to let anything come betwixt us and the findin' of—Dad. I'll speak the upper camp decent and they'll likely help and we'll all lay our grudge aside—*till after Dad's found!*"

CHAPTER XIII

A VOICE IN THE NIGHT

Ross paid little attention just then to Boots' last remark. Despite his success he felt a bit shaky and frightened at his own boldness in opposing the mob spirit that possessed the men.

"Whew!" he thought as he went back to the ledge, "if I'd had time to think what I was about to do, I wouldn't have done it probably—I'd have had cold feet and goose flesh instead!"

He felt that circumstances more than justified him in playing on the belief in the story circulated by MacFadden, if by so doing he could save the camps from bloodshed, and that is what he believed that he had accomplished, at least temporarily. Therefore, as he watched the men out of sight up the trail, a feeling of elation, pardonable elation, took possession of him. It grew with the moments, and inspired him with the idea of making, in the Book of Forgetfulness, an entry of achievement calculated to impress his father with the idea that he was learning not only to stop forgetting but to use his head independently. The

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affair of the letter to Kansas had not puffed him up because there he had been forced to act to get himself personally out of a tight corner as well as to rescue Kansas. But in this case he had forced his way to the front and made good there. He had marshaled his forces quickly and well. He had adopted a line of reasoning that had beaten down opposition. He had earned the right to his feeling of triumph.

With intense satisfaction he took down the book of unsavory records and uncapped his pen. He wrote in the date and got as far as a good sized "I." Then he sat gnawing the end of his pen. He could see his father turning the pages of that little book until he came to the "head-work" entry. He saw the eyes of the elder man suddenly narrow and his chin come into prominence, and the sight caused the glow of self-satisfaction to fade gradually. A slight flush reddened his cheek and unconsciously his own face followed in expression the face he was imagining. He crossed out the pronoun and threw the book back on the shelf.

"Guess before blowing my own whistle I'll wait until I see how the affair is coming out," he muttered with a sudden acquisition of common sense. "Maybe I won't feel so all-fired smart to-morrow over the matter as I do to-day!"

He wandered back to the ledge just as Boots

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and Harve rode down the trail on the bronchos belonging to the mining company. He stood watching them. Boots was on his way to "speak decent" to the men in the upper camp, and for the first time the other side of the matter struck the boy forcibly—would the upper camp "speak decent" in return?

"I'm glad," he concluded when Hank banged on the bottom of the dish-pan to call him to supper, "that I wasn't fool enough to make that entry, and in ink too, so I couldn't rub it out easily!"

As he sat down before his own plate, Hank, making unintelligible sounds, pointed to Mucker's plate, and Ross came upright with a start. He had forgotten Mucker again.

"I don't know where he is," he told the uncomprehending Hank, "and not one of the men has spoken about him."

Hearing shouts on the trail past the ledge he raced out and yelled down at Fatty, who was leading a working shift back to Dundee: "Has any one seen anything of Mucker?"

The men stopped and looked up. Every head expressed a negative, while Fatty replied: "No. Wort is whinin' around after him somewheres, but he hasn't turned up. When did ye see 'im last?"

"He was here to breakfast, and I haven't seen him since."

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"Wall, Doc, we've combed th' place pretty thorough fer Kansas, but we hain't turned up no Kansas ner Mucker. He ain't 'round. We think he must 'a' went over t' Eight this mornin', 'nd when th' Browns got out they had t' take Mucker with 'em fer fear he'd give 'em away."

This explanation was plausible, as Kansas and Ross were his only refuges, and the return of his father to Gales Ridge, "acting queer," might have led him to forsake Ross for the better known Kansas. Ross returned to his supper with a growing sense of mystery over the escape of the Eight outfit. How could Kansas' party possibly have gotten away burdened with an invalid, a half-wit, and a wounded man and left no footprints to point the way they had gone? Another thing also troubled him—who was to write to Nicholas Page of the tragedy? The answer was apparent. He must perform that painful task himself, as the Pages had no relatives in Wyoming and no friends were nearer to both father and son than himself.

For an hour after supper he attempted to write. He tore up sheet after sheet in the vain attempt to break the awful news gently. Finally he postponed the dreaded task. He became possessed with a spirit of unrest that demanded action. He wandered about aimlessly from his room to the

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office, then out on the ledge and back to the doctor's locked door.

Finally he took his field-glass and, descending the side of Gales Ridge, struck out down the cañon a few rods, across Wood River and into a deep gorge which cut its way into the heart of Dundee to afford a passage for a narrow, rushing stream. He had never been in this side cañon before. He made slow progress, owing to the difficult nature of the way. The gorge was merely a wide crack in the mountain. Sometimes a foothold was afforded only in projecting stones in the bed of the creek itself. Once he was obliged to climb up around a waterfall. The sides of the crack, which he paused every few moments to survey through his glass, were bare save for an occasional sage-brush, and inaccessible. Finally it dawned on him that at the right he was looking up at the summit from which, that very morning, he had looked down as he walked behind Boots along the edge of a gorge, on the second side of the trap that the Gales Ridge men were beating up so thoroughly.

"Stupid of me!" he exclaimed aloud. "Of course this is Dundee Creek! This is the very gorge we were looking down into!"

He sat down and leaned far back against a rock until he could sweep with his glass the summit

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where he had walked. It looked from his present position more impossible even than it had looked from above. The perpendicular side rock overhung the gorge and sent forth waterspouts from every crack and seam. One, some distance beyond his present resting place, gushed forth with a greater volume than the rest, and fell some twenty feet into the creek with a sound like distant thunder. He sat there looking about and speculating on the whereabouts of the Browns until darkness threatened the gorge and an explosion from above told him that the shift under Fatty had commenced work on Seven. Then he returned to the office.

He was not able, however, to shake off his uneasiness, and when, at ten o'clock, he went to his room, he removed only his shoes and coat before stretching out in his bunk. He felt that he ought to be able to meet any demands made on the office as long as his chief was ready to meet none. For a long time he lay staring at the half-sash window, that was but faintly outlined by the dim starlight. The moon had not yet arisen. Finally, he dropped into a restless sleep. He dreamed he was creeping along the edge of the precipice above Dundee Creek peering at some one who stood in the creek bed below. Suddenly he was compelled to slip over the edge, but instead

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of falling rapidly, his downward progress seemed to be impeded by a voice. The voice came from over his head, and he was clinging to it with both hands as to an anchor while trying to find a foothold to check his fall.

Then the voice came nearer, and he found his foothold at once. He stopped and listened, trying to look up at the speaker. This effort brought him upright in his bunk and he found a hand gently shaking his shoulder and a voice saying in a low tone: "Doc! Doc Tenderfoot, wake up!"

"All right, Kansas," he replied quietly enough, although his heart leaped into his throat. "I'm awake."

The hand on his shoulder tightened. "Don't speak loud," warned Kansas. "I'm guessin' my life ain't worth much in camp now?" The remark was an interrogation.

Ross gripped the hand on his shoulder. "It's worth a good deal here," he whispered, "with me."

There was a sound in the throat of the other as he returned the boy's grip. "This is thankin' ye, Doc, fer yer good will. I come because—I trusted ye—Jean's arm's in a bad way."

Ross grabbed for his shoes. "Where is he hidin'?"

"He ain't hidin' just now," returned Kansas. "He's out in the office with Mucker."

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Ross fumbled at the lacings of his shoes. "Mucker! Then he did go to you this morning?"

"Yes."

"The men looked for him—Wort's been whining around about him, and the men suspected he was with you when he didn't turn up."

"Then—they haven't suspected anything else about him?"

The constrained tone and peculiar manner in which this was said arrested Ross's attention as he arose from the fastening of his shoes.

"Suspect—what?" he asked bluntly.

"Hadn't ye thought of Mucker along with th' work in Seven?"

A light flashed across Ross's mental horizon. He grasped Kansas' arm excitedly. "He did it then, Kansas, did he?" in a shrill whisper. "Mucker—why, that's what he has meant—he has kept insisting that he knew where matches were! Then it was Mucker who blew up Seven."

"Wall—ye've said it!" returned Kansas quietly. "He done it, as he said, t' help me! Ye see we talked too much before 'im about what such a lot of powder 'ud do t' Seven if it went off once—and he remembered. We never thought of 'im when we was gassin'." Then with no word of comment

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or blame, he added, "I brought 'im back here. I guess ye can take 'im in, can't ye?"

"Yes, yes," assented Ross hastily. "I'll keep him with me—but the men won't believe he did it——"

"Of course not," assented Kansas; "everything points too strong my way. Nobody'd believe he was smart enough to do it all by himself. He—but I hain't time, Doc, for much palaver. The Greasers—will they be safe here with your men?"

"I think so. The Mexicans haven't been given much thought except as they added to the difficulty of your clearing out. Where are they, anyway?"

"Hidin'," briefly. "I'll tell ye as soon as ye git Jean fixed up."

"Where is he?"

"Right here—in the kitchen. I fetched 'em both in 'nd shut the office door. Some one might come in there sudden, ye know."

Kansas moved toward the door, but Ross grasped his arm. It was wet, but Ross was too excited to notice the fact. "Is his arm in bad shape? The doctor's—laid up."

"I suspicioned that. Yes, Doc, it's in bad shape—and—I thought mebbe ye could dry 'im up some, too, before we went on."

"Dry ——" Ross began and paused aware, for

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the first time, of the wetness of the other's clothing and the peculiar "splash" his shoes made at every step. They were water-soaked. "How ——" Ross was beginning, but Kansas had slipped into the kitchen.

The boy at once put all speculation into the background and applied himself to the immediate situation. There were many things to do which would necessitate an activity in the shack that might attract the attention of any one passing between Dundee and the Gales Ridge bunk house. He knew no one would sleep much that night. Fastening a blanket hastily over the window he lighted a lamp and turned it low while Kansas supported Jean into the room, followed by Mucker. When the door was closed Ross turned up the light and then uttered a suppressed exclamation. All three newcomers were water-soaked, and Jean, white-lipped, his face drawn with pain, was in a chill.

"Quick," Ross directed, "get his clothes off."

He dove into one of his suit cases and produced a clean flannel shirt, and slit the right sleeve. Then he aided Kansas in getting Jean free of his wet clothes and into the bunk. Little pools of water formed where each of the three had stood, and Mucker, shivering, began to whimper. Ross hastily flung him his overcoat in which the younger

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boy wrapped himself, while Ross, with a sinking heart, looked at the broken arm, inflamed, swollen and bloody.

"It was dark," announced Mucker suddenly, his shivers ceasing. He spoke in a proud voice. "They was a awful noise and I never cried—did I, Kansas?"

He stood at the foot of the bunk, his eyes fixed on Kansas, who did not hear him, engaged as he was in soothing and quieting Jean whose chills were giving place to fever. But Jean heard.

"Noise?" gasped the sick man hoarsely. "The world come to an end, that's all. But I knew I was right. Kansas said Dad must know about it, and I said he couldn't, and I was right, wasn't I?"

With his well hand he caught Kansas' arm and held it in a painfully tight grasp urging, "I was right, Kansas. Dad didn't know—no one could 'a' known, because nobody found us."

Kansas liberated his arm and held Jean down in the bunk. "Yes, yes," he whispered soothingly, "ye're right. If any one had 'a' known we couldn't 'a' made our get-away. Ye was right. But, Jean, boy, ye mustn't talk now. No, ye must lay still. Yes, I know it hurts—it hurts cruel—yes, yer head must hurt too, but ye mustn't give way t' it, Jean, fer we've got t' be gittin' on. Jest hold strong to that, Jean—we must go on to-night. Yes, but Jean—ye don't want t' swing t' the nearest tree

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that's big enough t' hold yer weight, do ye? Wall, hold steady, then, and let Doc examine yer arm. There now, bite yer lips and so keep from making a noise—we'll be heard, Jean, if ye take on like that—ye must keep still—d'ye hear me, boy? D'ye understand—ye've got t' keep still and let Doc here fix up yer arm so we can be movin' on!"

But Jean, sick, feverish, suffering, was beyond his brother's control. He would not allow Ross to handle the broken and torn arm.

"He needs Dr. Scudder," said the boy, sitting back on his heels, "and he needs him bad."

His anger burned against the man of skill and knowledge useless behind his locked door. The wound evidently contained the bullet, and the embryo surgeon was helpless before the case.

Kansas started toward the door. "Shall I smash in his door, Doc, and fetch 'im out?"

Ross hesitated. "He'd be of no use if you did—for hours, that is. He's dead drunk."

Kansas returned to Jean's side. "Hours is what counts with us now, Doc," quietly. "We can't wait. Ye'll have t' do your best with 'im."

"But—you see——" Ross was beginning when a look at the set face bent over the bunk silenced him. To himself he said, "Jean will never travel far without some one that knows more than I do

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to fix that arm," but aloud he only said, "Well, I'll get busy and do the best I can—but ——"

"That's all any one can do," Kansas interrupted.

Ross rose. "I'll see to getting some water heated and bringing in some stuff from the office."

Kansas hastily picked up Jean's shoes and turning them over drained them. "Hot water means a fire, Doc, don't it? And Jean's shoes ought t' be dried out. Yours won't go on 'im."

"Give 'em here," said Ross, holding out his hand. "I'll set them in front of the oven." Then, "Did you all fall into Wood River?"

Kansas shook his head. "We've been in the wet ever since we—left Eight."

He said nothing further, and Ross asked no more questions. With the shoes in his hand he was leaving the room when he paused, struck by a new difficulty. "See here," he broke out, turning back, "Hank ought to understand what's going on, or he may raise a racket at the wrong time. He's in a bunk behind the stove, but I can't talk to him."

"The thing t' do," said Kansas promptly, "is to git 'im in here where he can see my fingers, 'n' leave 'im with me a while."

This was done as quietly as possible, while Ross went into the office, saw to it that the outer door was closed—there was no way of locking it—and

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then, closing the door between the kitchen and office, he built a fire in the darkness and filled a kettle with water while Kansas labored satisfactorily with Hank's slow understanding.

"I dread to tell Kansas how bad Jean's arm is," Ross groaned as he filled the kitchen stove with wood.

When he returned to the side of the bunk, the wounded man frantically refused to let him touch the inflamed arm. In vain Kansas urged, commanded and implored. Jean rolled fever-reddened eyes from one to the other and fought fiercely against the aid he was beyond understanding.

"You can see," said the embryo surgeon finally, "I must cleanse the wound, and he won't let me touch it unless ——"

"Yes—well?" Kansas spoke steadily.

"I must give him a hypodermic."

"All right," readily. "Why not?"

Ross faltered and looked down. "In order to quiet him enough so he will let me handle that arm"—he spoke haltingly—"I must give him a pretty big dose ——"

"So much the better," interrupted Kansas; "that will make travelin' easier fer 'im."

Ross drew a long breath. "But you see it may—it may ——"

He stopped abruptly. He lacked the courage

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to tell Kansas that the dose would make immediate traveling impossible for Jean. He hadn't the heart to finish. He picked up the syringe. The arm must be attended to at all hazards. He would fix that up to the best of his ability. Further than that his thoughts did not push.

The hypodermic was administered and the arm cleansed and bandaged. But as Ross worked Kansas saw with painful clearness the thing that Ross dreaded to tell him. It whitened his face, but did not disturb the steadiness of his hands nor put tremors into his low voice. Occasionally, Ross glanced at him furtively, wondering how far his thoughts had taken him toward the heart of the dilemma and its solution.

"Doc," said the latter finally, "Jean's gone to sleep fer the night, ain't he?"

Ross nodded. "Pretty nearly. I had to give him a good-sized dose, as I told you, to keep him quiet."

"'N' when he wakes up——" Kansas began and then his voice trailed off into a mutter, "He's a pretty sick man 'n' ——"

Ross, bending over the end of a bandage, did not look up at him. For a moment there was silence in the room. Mucker had seated himself at the end of the bunk, and resting his head against it had gone to sleep. On the shelf behind

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them, beside the Book of Forgetfulness, the hands of a nickel clock pointed to midnight.

Ross carefully arranged a sling for Jean's arm. Acting at the request of Kansas he had fixed the wounded man ready for traveling, knowing that travel was out of the question.

"Well," he whispered finally, "I've done all I can do."

He arose and faced Kansas, his eyes interrogation marks.

Kansas stood beside the bunk staring down at Jean's fever-red face, his own contracted in a desperate effort to decide on his course. From Dundee sounded another explosion, marking the progress of the night shift. Ross, startled, stepped back and came against the shelf, hitting something with his elbow. It fell to the floor. He stooped and picked up the thin Book of Forgetfulness. It lay open at the large "I" which he had with such pride written so recently and so recently sensibly crossed out. He laid the book on the shelf and turned his back on it in sudden repugnance. Already he was backing out of the job of using his head! He glanced at Kansas, who had dropped his chin on his chest and clenched his hands by his sides. Kansas needed help. He evidently had thought of no way out. A head was certainly needed, a head that could plan and plan quickly.

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Ross turned again to the little book. Not many hours ago it had inspired him to useful thought.

A quick movement behind him and a whispered ejaculation caused him to whirl with a hopeful cry: "Have you got it, Kansas ——"

A quick "Sh!" cut his loud speech off. He had forgotten the necessity for silence.

The next instant Kansas had blown out the light, and was whispering rapidly: "Some one's in the office. Hear the rap on the doctor's door? Quick—off with yer shoes as though ye was just out of yer bunk."

Ross dropped to the floor and pulled off one shoe while Kansas pulled at the other. It was the work of only a moment to remove them.

"There now," Kansas' whisper was in his ear, "they're headed this way. Go—'nd act sleepy!"

The boy's heart was pounding in anything but a sleepy manner, but he threw open his door noisily and said confusedly, "What's up?"

Some one had opened the kitchen door and was groping his way forward. "I heard ye talkin'. Is Dr. Scudder with ye?"

Ross's tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, but Kansas' firm hand gripped his shoulder and Kansas' whisper breathed in his ear, "*You—talk—in—yer—sleep!*" Then the hand pushed him out into the kitchen.

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The intruder, who was Fatty, struck a match and holding it above his head looked at the boy asking again, "Is the doctor with ye?"

Ross blinked at the match. "Nope," he managed to get out.

"But I heard ye ——"

"Aunt Anne," interrupted Ross truthfully, "has always said I talk in my sleep." Then rapidly, "The doctor's in his room. Maybe you can wake him up, but I've not been able to ——"

"Huh! Doped as usual! Wall, it's somethin' ye can attend to—I've just drove a full size tree into my hand and I can't git the end out."

Ross lighted the lamp in the office and looked at Fatty's hand. There was an ugly sliver driven deep into the fleshy part of the thumb. The boy got a lance, turpentine and bandages from the medicine cupboard and turning up the light until it smoked began his task. All the time he was at work he was talking with Fatty, but subconsciously he was admiring the quick thought of Kansas.

"I came within one of giving the thing dead away!" he thought, "and that just when I was trying to think how I could save the situation."

He had removed the main part of the sliver and was going after the deeply imbedded end when Fatty's glance chanced to wander to the floor.

"Huh!" he ejaculated curiously. "Looks as

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though ye had turned the Missouri River through this room, mud 'n' all! What's doin'?"

Ross's tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth and his hair stirred. So completely was he taken by surprise that every idea deserted him, and he did, unintentionally, the very best thing possible under the circumstances. The lance slipped, bedded itself in Fatty's sensitive flesh and with a loud "Ouch—gee whiz, Doc!" the injured man forgot the floor with its pools of water and mud.

Ross, quick to see the result of his unprofessional nervousness, hurried the end of the sliver out of the wound, disinfected the hand and bandaged it. Then, while Fatty's lips were still pressed together in a heroic effort to ignore the pain, Ross turned to the lamp and blew it out, saying at once, as though the action were due to thoughtlessness:

"Well, there! What did I do that for before you got out? Guess I need to get a little more sleep!"

"Never mind!" rejoined Fatty amiably. "Here's the door. I'm all right. Moon'll be up in a little while."

Ross, drawing long breaths of relief, followed Fatty out on the ledge. He saw the latter had not given another thought to the condition of the office floor. He was walking, sure footed, across the ledge toward Wort's cabin. The night was

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densely dark. The stars did not light the black depths of the cañon. Fatty made his way by a sense of direction rather than sight, as he had brought no light along, not even a miner's candle.

"You can't find your way back," Ross called.

"Huh!" responded Fatty, "I can travel this trail with my eyes blindfolded and my hands roped behind me! Good thing I can," he added, "fer this ledge here is a regular man-trap, only it's fixed proper fer keepin' folks out as well as in!"

Ross hardly heard the remark at first. He stood waiting merely to make sure that Fatty was not coming back before he returned to the lean-to. He listened until the man's steps died away in the distance and then turned back to the office door. There he found himself repeating absently Fatty's last words.

He uttered an exclamation and stopped. The sentence repeated itself again. The side of the mountain flashed on his mental sight, the ledge isolated by its position—the trail—the shack——

"So it is!" he whispered excitedly. "Why, so it is! Fatty's right."

He made his way to the door of the lean-to and threw it open whispering excitedly, "Kansas, I've got it! I've got it! The place where you can hide best and be safest—you and Jean—is right here in this room!"

CHAPTER XIV

A STRANGE TRAIL

"HERE!" whispered Kansas thickly. "In this room? Safe here?"

Ross hastily pointed out the advantages of the plan in the situation of the shack, isolated on the ledge, and of the room itself. "And Jean can't travel, anyway," he added, "and you can't carry him far."

"That's so, Doc. Ye're right—but what about you—if they should suspicion that you helped us ——"

Eagerly Ross explained that suspicion would not easily attach to him because the Gales Ridge men believed he was in camp for the purpose of running Kansas out. "It's the last place in the Union where they'd suspect you were."

Kansas scratched his head and lighting the lamp again looked at Jean.

"Another thing," insisted Ross, "you must have a competent physician within twenty-four hours or—well, your brother will ——" he ended abruptly.

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"Pass in his checks," finished Kansas quietly, in the vernacular of the mountains. Then, after a pause, "Yes, Doc, I may as well give up the idee of gittin' Jean out of here fer a day 'r two—but it's goin' t' be hard t' manage—'nd I don't think it can be managed!"

"To-morrow," Ross promised easily, "I'll have Dr. Scudder on deck ready for work if I have to"—here the last phrase he had heard the doctor use occurred to him—"if I have to rope him and brand him and compel him to quit! And then with both of us to work things outside and you in here it can be managed, I tell you—it must be."

In the end his reasoning prevailed. It would certainly be the last place in the state where the Gales Ridge men would expect to find the man they had sworn to take vengeance on, and the room was ideally situated for the purpose to which Ross proposed to put it. The office and the doctor's room faced the accessible end of the ledge. From the office a door led into the large room which served as kitchen and dining-room and also contained Hank's bunk. Between Ross's room, a lean-to and the office, lay this kitchen. The lean-to, although uncomfortably small to hold two men, looked down seventy-five feet from its only window, being built on the edge of the ledge.

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The window, furthermore, looked along an uninhabited expanse of mountainside covered with sage-brush and rocks.

"But what about the Mexicans?" asked Ross suddenly. "I had forgotten them. Where are they? Won't they give you away?"

Kansas was standing in the middle of the floor in deep thought. At first he merely shook his head. Then he replied slowly, "I can git around them all right. But, Doc, there's somethin' that puzzles me—'nd frets me too. I can't put it off any longer with Jean here quiet. I want t' ask ——"

"Well?"

Kansas hesitated. "Even if yer father did back Dad, there can't be any harm now in answerin' ——"

"My father's being interested doesn't have any weight with me, as I told you the other night," Ross interrupted impatiently. "His interest is only financial. Trot out your questions ——"

Kansas drew a long breath. "Is Dad's men back?"

"Yes, every man of 'em."

"Was they along when ye come up after the explosion?" Kansas' tone showed utter incredulity.

"Of course they were."

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"And didn't none of 'em say they suspected where we was?"

Ross was surprised at the question. "They said most emphatically that they didn't suspect and couldn't guess. They've searched the mountains for you. Your get-away is a nine days' wonder to us all. How did you work it?"

But Kansas, his forehead furrowed in a deep frown of perplexity, merely muttered, "Jean had it figgered out right then, but I can't hardly believe it yet."

"Believe what?"

"Believe that neither Dad ner his men found what they'd run onto. Say, Doc, can ye tell me this? Have ye heard any mention from—well, from Dad himself, seein' ye was friends with him, about findin' anything uncommon in the tunnel at Seven, say, within the last three weeks?"

"Not a word," declared Ross. "And he has talked with me freely about Seven."

"Jean is right, then," declared Kansas with growing conviction. "He had a the'ry that if any of Dad's men knew MacFadden would have found out about it, and as Mac didn't say anything to us we reckoned he didn't know, and so no one knew."

"I wish you'd stop talking like a Chinese puzzle——"

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"Yes, yes, Doc," Kansas interrupted, "I'll tell ye—but I'm all mixed up over it. I don't know what t' think—'r do."

"I don't know what you're driving at," retorted Ross, "but you're not the only one that hasn't known what to think or to do to-day. You had every one guessing when you disappeared over that ledge, I tell you, and the earth opened and swallowed you!"

Kansas smiled faintly. He passed his hand over his eyes and spoke absently. "The earth didn't swallow us, but the tunnel did."

"The tunnel!" Ross's tone was incredulous. "Did you go into the tunnel?"

"Yes—that was Jean's idee ——"

"But the tunnel was blown up. How did you get out?"

"Walked out."

Ross shook Kansas' arm excitedly. "What are you talking about, Kansas? I was in the tunnel myself—clear to the end. You were not there."

"Doc," exclaimed Kansas, "we was there right behind a bit of new timberin'. There's where Jean's reasonin' come in. I follered Jean. We grabbed up Rodrigo and a rope 'nd axe and a few things 'nd hiked into that tunnel. I never expected t' come out alive—but Jean did—and Jean

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proved right. It was our only way, anyhow, fer it didn't take more'n a glance t' show us we was cut off by the Gales Ridge fellers climbin' up acrost Dundee and cutting us off there."

"If only I knew what you are talking about!" exclaimed Ross helplessly.

"Doc," said Kansas, lifting his head as though he had arrived at some decision, "I'll tell ye about it on our way over. I've been thinkin'. We've got t' hurry. There's somethin' t' be done besides goin' after the Greasers, and I guess you'll have t' help. Can we both leave Jean?"

Ross went over to the bunk. "I guess he's in for quite a sleep."

"All right then. We'll go 'nd get the Greasers—and do a little lookin' fer Dad ourselves."

"Dad!" Ross whirled toward the speaker. "Do you know where Dad is?"

"Nope, but we can soon find out whether he's in his tunnel or not."

"But," cried Ross stupidly, "we can't get into Seven!"

"Jest what we can do, and that easy," retorted Kansas.

For an instant Ross stared wordlessly at Kansas. Then light broke in on him of Dad's theory of the cause underlying the explosion that had been heard so plainly in Seven. "Then," he said slowly,

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"you did run a tunnel between Seven and Eight, didn't you?"

"No," returned Kansas, "I hain't, but Natur has. Now, Doc, let's git busy, and I'll explain as we hike along."

He paused and looked the boy over. "Got a slicker?"

Ross stepped to a nail in the side logs and took down a water-proof coat and donned it.

"Rubber boots?" asked Kansas.

In reply Ross bent and fished a pair out from under the bunk and put them on.

"That's better," approved Kansas. "Ye're bound t' git as wet as we are without 'em, and we can't have too many wet things hangin' around the stove."

Ross nodded, thinking of the wet floor of the office, and Fatty's powers of observation.

"Now," Kansas went on, "we need candles 'nd an axe—we didn't fetch but one away from Eight—'nd a blanket—in case we find—him—'nd can carry 'im away."

In a few minutes they were feeling their way quietly down the side of Gales Ridge, their pockets filled with candles, Ross bearing the blanket and Kansas the axe. When Kansas, who led, reached the stage trail he turned down the cañon and hurried forward. Presently they heard voices and

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slipped behind a rock, while two Gales Ridge men passed them talking angrily against Kansas and what they would have done had they caught him.

"Wall," one of them exclaimed, "we may run acrost his trail yet. Stranger things have happened. And if we do—wall—it'll be a life fer a life."

"But the Greasers," said his companion carelessly. "It's a pity he took the Greasers with 'im. They'd come in right handy on the diggin' in Seven."

As the two passed out of hearing Ross whispered: "That's what I told you—the men don't lay anything up against the Mexicans."

"We'll bring 'em down, then," said Kansas, "and ye can turn 'em in to the work."

Ross, suppressing with difficulty a dozen questions, arose from his uncomfortable crouching position behind the rock and was starting on when Kansas caught his arm and pulled him back.

"Listen," he muttered. "Some one else is comin'."

At first Ross heard nothing, but soon there reached his ears the rattle of wheels and excited voices. It was the upper camp returning with Boots and Harve. They came in two crowded wagons furnished by some ranchmen of the valley.

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They had evidently broken off in the midst of a celebration and responded willingly to the call for help from the rival camp. As the wagons rattled past, the listeners heard some one say :

" I didn't think that of Kansas—I thought he'd fight in the open. Wall—as Boots says, th' thing now is t' find Dad's body. After that," significantly, " we can settle them little boundary lines as we want 'em settled ! "

Ross felt Kansas wince at the reference to himself, but all he said when they were again alone was, " Wall, they've gone back on me, but the quarrel between the camps is jest asleep. It'll wake up as soon as Dad is found 'r known about in any way. Down in Meeteetse there was so much goin' on and the town was so full there wasn't any quarrelin' between camps. At least the Greasers said there wa'n't. But it's bound t' break out up here—without me to hold my party back—or Dad to hold."

Presently they crept out from behind cover, and stole quietly again a few rods further down the cañon, then across a crude bridge built of tree trunks, and struck into the same gorge Ross had visited only a few hours before.

" Dundee Creek," he muttered. " I'm glad the moon is coming up. It's rough traveling here."

Although but little moonlight penetrated to the

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bottom of the deep gorge, that little enabled them to find their way past the spot where Ross had stopped and on to the foot of the larger stream which he had noticed bursting from the side of the perpendicular wall twenty feet overhead. To his surprise, Kansas led the way around the pool into which this cascade fell, and instead of continuing up the creek, turned in under the waterfall.

"Why," gasped the boy, raising his voice to be heard above the thunder of falling water, "we can't climb this wall!"

"Hain't got to," answered Kansas. "We're goin' *through* it!"

"Through it!" panted Ross. "Through it!"

Kansas put out his hand and groped along the wet rock until he found what he sought. For a moment Ross could not see what he was holding, as the moonlight scarcely penetrated this retreat. They stood on wet, slippery rocks with their backs to the dripping side of the cliff, while over their head the water leaped outward from the wall and fell beyond them with a sound out of all proportion to its volume.

"We're goin' back to Eight *and* Seven," Kansas said, his mouth close to Ross's ear. "We're goin' in the way we come out."

Here he stepped back, and Ross, his eyes accustomed to the dim light, saw that he held the end



A ROPE WAS SWAYING BESIDE THE DRIPPING ROCK

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of a rope which was swaying beside the dripping rock, reaching down from the blackness overhead. Kansas brought it forward and knotted it beneath the boy's armpits. Then he jerked it three times and Ross found himself ascending slowly, gliding up against the slimy wall until he was pulled into an open space at the head of the waterfall beside a stunted pine that had thrust its roots into the dirt-filled crevices of the rock. His damp back was assailed by a steady outrush of air. About him were the dark forms of the Mexicans, and their jabbering voices, raised in astonishment when they saw that the newcomer was not Kansas.

With numb fingers Ross untied the rope about him and handed the end to one of the men, at the same time motioning below.

The other nodded and cast the coil down again. Then, while Ross crawled away from the dizzying edge, the Mexicans laid hold of the rope and pulled again until they brought Kansas into view. He talked with the men for a few moments in their own language and then spoke to Ross.

"Doc, we'll light up after we've got a little int' the crevice so the light won't shine out against the opposite wall of the gorge. Can't be too careful. Here—give me yer arm. Ye don't know the way."

"Where are we?"

"We're in a seam 'r crevice through the moun-

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tain. These peaks are full of 'em. Guess ye must 'a' run on some yerself."

"I have."

"Wall, this is a full sized one. I suspect they start as little cracks and then the water dreens int' 'em and cuts 'em down 'n' washes 'em out until they're good sized tunnels. We didn't know nothing about this one till th' morning before the Fourth when Jean was on shift. He put a shot and bust int' this ——"

"Oh!" cried Ross, "I was there, at Eight, you know, at the time—Jean came out of the tunnel looking pretty excited—was this what he had found? I thought probably he had burst into a pocket of good ore."

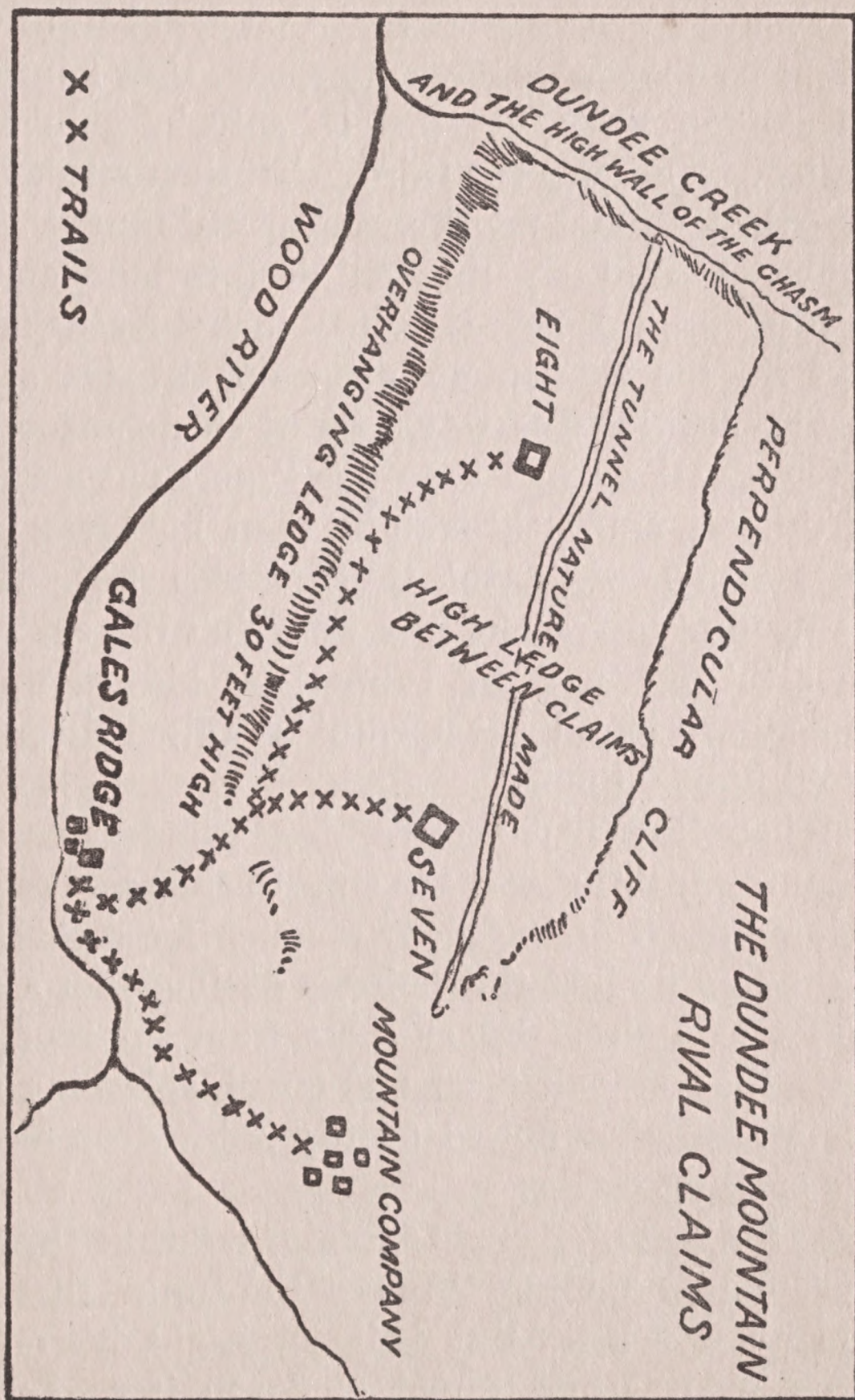
"This was it. He come after me 'nd we done a little explorin'. I thought, of course, that Dad knew all about the crack and was jest waitin' fer us t' open th' tunnel int' it and then he could take a sneak int' our tunnel 'n' see what grade of ore we was a-handlin' ——"

"But Dad didn't know anything about it," Ross interrupted.

"Wall, that was th' conclusion Jean come to, but I didn't believe him at the time." Here Kansas hesitated. "'Twas a good thing I didn't believe 'im 'r we wouldn't be alive now."

"How's that?"

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THE NATURAL TUNNEL CONNECTING THE TWO CLAIMS

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"Why, I was so sure that Dad could walk into Eight by th' back door, so to speak, that I insisted on stoppin' work 'n' takin' th' shift 'n' goin' after timber. That was the third. 'N' then all day the Fourth Jean and me timbered in th' tunnel. We timbered solid on th' side of this here crevice openin' toward Seven. But, lucky fer us, we'd jest set the timbers in place on th' side of th' crevice lookin' this way. So when we made our get-away all we had t' do was t' pull out a couple of timbers, crawl through 'n' then hold 'em back in position while th' Gales Ridge men come a-streamin' in t' make sure we wa'n't there. Then after th' mouth of th' tunnel was blowed up we come down here t' the openin' 'n' waited till night. We'll light up now."

When Ross had lighted his candle he raised it, scanning with interest the smooth sides and ragged dripping roof of the rocky seam. It was seven or eight feet high at this point, a drainage for a vast area of Dundee. Everywhere from the roof and sides the water dripped and oozed, splashing into the stream that flowed swiftly ankle deep toward the opening.

"This seam," Kansas explained, "runs through the mountain, clean through the tunnel at Eight and on t' Seven. But while at Eight it's on the same level as our tunnel, at Seven it *runs under*

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the tunnel so that the roof of the crevice is the floor of Dad's tunnel. His is on a level a few feet above ours."

"If that's so," ejaculated Ross, "it would account for Dad's men hearing a shot put in your tunnel! It must have been the blast that broke you through into the crevice. It gave them a great start and bothered Dad."

Ross related what Dad had told him the morning of the third as they stood on the Dundee trail looking at Eight.

Kansas had no time for further explanation, as they were confronted now by a row of timbers set close together across the passage. This was the entrance to Eight. Kansas pushed aside the timbers which he had held in place when he entered the crevice, and the party filed across the width of the tunnel in silence. While Kansas with a few blows of the axe dislodged a timber on the opposite side Ross peered toward the ruined mouth of the tunnel, but could see nothing. The air, however, despite the natural tunnel, was bad. As soon as Kansas had dislodged the timber they pushed through the opening and hastened up the crevice toward Seven. They went the rest of the way with candles lifted to show them where to dodge and stoop, for the roof was more jagged and uneven here, and lower. Finally Kansas, who

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was in the advance, stopped and lowered his candle with a brief, "We're here. Now fer git-tin' in."

Ross looked up. Directly overhead was a timbered space, the roof of the crevice which was the floor of Dad's tunnel. As he saw the situation, the crevice open and accessible to Seven, with only a few timbers between, the same question occurred to him which had troubled Kansas: "How could Dad—how could any one who worked in Seven—and had put those timbers down to tramp over, avoid a knowledge of that seam, that way to the open from the tunnel above?"

Kansas gave a few orders to the Mexicans, handed over the axe to the strongest, and stepped back. Ross followed him.

"Doc, can ye see how it come about that no one in Seven knows anything about this here runway?" he asked.

"No, I don't. It seems as if they must know, and yet I believe, from all Dad said, they don't."

"See here." Kansas lowered his candle. "See all this mess underfoot. It was from this that Jean figured out th' truth. Jean has a long head."

Ross looked. He had been stumbling over broken stones without noticing them.

"Jean convinced me," Kansas continued, "and it must 'a' been this way. When th' shot was put

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up above us that opened up this roof, it not only made the hole but poured enough rock down here so the hole was stopped up. Now the men up above jest noticed when they went to cleanin' away the muss of the shot that the floor was sort of uncertain, like the sides is in places, showin' dirt and stone mixed instead of a solid rock floor, and they had to have a solid floor fer the rails t' run th' hand-car over. So they jest leveled off th' floor over th' heap of muck and rock and laid th' timbers down. Then the water begun t' git in its work down here under the mess that had stopped up th' hole. See?" He lowered the candle to the shallow but swift stream. "It begun t' wash away th' muck and rock little by little, makin' the pile sink down away from the timbers until there wa'n't nothin' left but these heavy rocks that th' water can't budge. And fer a month 'r more th' men up there in Seven have been goin' back 'nd forth over them timbers without dreamin' that they was walkin' over a crack in th' mountain that would 'a' took 'em right through Eight t' Dundee Creek."

"Would it—could it have done Dad any good if he had known?" asked Ross, but his voice was lost in the noise caused by the Mexicans, who were working at the logs overhead.

For a few minutes no one spoke, and Ross, his

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thoughts focussed now solely on Dad and Dad's probable fate, held his candle aloft in a shaking hand. Finally the Mexicans, chopping at a disadvantage from below, got one log cut through. The ends sagged, and there was a rush of dirt from above, followed by a rush of foul imprisoned air. The men, laying hold of the ends, pulled them down, leaving an opening large enough to admit Kansas. Climbing to the shoulders of the choppers he crawled through the opening. A dozen candles were raised to him, but they only served to show the pallor of his face as he looked down and refused them with a wave of his hand.

"He's right here," he said in a quiet voice, "face down on the logs. It's the best place fer air that he could 'a' got if he'd been choosin'. But it's no ways likely he was choosin'—and I dunno—whether he needs—air ——"

It was only the work of a few moments for Kansas to lower Dad, and for Ross to ascertain beyond a doubt that he still lived. It was a more arduous task to get him to the mouth of the crevice, but Kansas, although a more slender man than the other, bore him on his shoulders, steadied and supported on either side by Ross and one of the Mexicans. At the mouth of the crevice the entire party were lowered, by means of the rope, to the cañon of Dundee Creek. Ross was let down first,

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and then the unconscious Dad, well wrapped in the blankets which Kansas had caused Ross to provide for that very purpose. Kansas came last.

"Better leave two of the men to get Rodrigo up to the ledge the best way they can," Ross urged, "and hurry Dad along. I don't know what's the matter. Maybe it's asphyxiation and shock, and maybe internal injuries."

Ross spoke buoyantly, for it seemed to him that with Dad found alive the end of their difficulties was in sight. Kansas nodded and spoke to the Mexicans. Then he superintended cutting and trimming long spruce limbs. Over these he rolled the sides of Dad's blanket, forming an easy litter on which to carry him. Then, with four Mexicans grasping the ends of the poles, the procession started on its difficult way toward Wood River cañon.

During this slow, wordless process, Ross had time to notice that the finding of Dad had not relieved Kansas' face of its harassed expression. This, however, he attributed to worry over Jean's condition, and as they approached the wagon trail began in his naturally loud voice:

"I think Jean will ——"

A sharp "Sh!" and a grasp on his arm both stopped and astonished him. His voice sank to a

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whisper, however, as he asked: "What's the need for secrecy now, with Dad here and alive?"

Kansas stood still. He laid a hand on Ross's shoulder and murmured haltingly, "I've seen, Doc, that ye think finding him gits us all out of this mess."

"Of course," Ross began. "I've been so glad to find that Dad lives—he isn't as much alive as I wish he were, but when we get Dr. Scudder on the job ——"

"But there's somethin' of a stretch in between," Kansas interrupted, "that I guess ye hain't looked at—I've been lookin' at nothin' else since we left Seven."

"Oh!" muttered Ross as Kansas paused. The situation began to shape itself for him vaguely. Half-difficulties flitted through his mind—but Dad was still alive. That was the only thing that counted now, and Kansas was safe.

But Kansas' steady murmur shattered this idea of safety rudely. "Doc, I went after Dad with my eyes wide open, knowin' that if we got 'im dead 'r alive, it 'ud mix things up here more'n ever."

Ross stared at the other uncomprehendingly.

Kansas raised a foot to the rock and rested an elbow on his knee.

"Doc, I guess ye don't see what a hole we're in—and not only Jean and me, but the two camps."

CHAPTER XV

THE HORNS OF THE DILEMMA

"WELL, no!" exclaimed Ross. "I don't see—with Dad found ——"

"We'll have t' stop here a minute and talk it over." Kansas spoke slowly in order to bring the truth home to Ross. "I can't see our way out, Doc—I've got t' have yer head in on this."

Ross squared his shoulders unconsciously.

"Wall, now," Kansas went on, "I've been thinkin' this way: here's Dad. Suppose we take 'im up in on th' ledge and put him som'ers in the doctor's shack ——"

Ross nodded hopefully. "Yes, we'll find a place ——"

"But that's not the point. See here. Suppose ye let th' Gales Ridge men know that he's found—that's yer idee, ain't it?"

Ross's eyes opened widely. "Yes, all I've thought was how glad they'd be to know."

"But see here! D'ye recall what the men said on th' wagon that passed us—that after Dad was

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found they'd turn to and settle the score of th' boundary with th' fellers they're helpin' now."

"Oh!" exclaimed Ross, and each letter was long drawn.

"Ye see, don't ye? Now if we take 'im up there and let th' boys know that he's found, both parties, of course, will stop diggin'—there'll be nothin' more t' dig fer, and then ——"

"They'll go to fighting!" added Ross.

"That's it. Ye see what I mean. And here'll be Dad not alive enough t' act as a brake on the Gales Ridge men. It'll be hours before Mr. Scudder'll be on the job to see t' Dad, and in th' meantime th' shack'll be a trompin' ground fer th' Gales Ridge men, and ——"

Kansas came to an abrupt stop, but Ross, his attention fully arrested, leaped at the end of the sentence. "And with the house filled with Gales Ridge men—there's Jean, maybe so delirious we can't keep him still—and you—at the mercy of the men—no, that will never do."

Kansas stood straight and the two gazed at each other steadily. Ross was the first to speak, but it was a hesitating speech. "Couldn't we make a place in my room for Dad—it would be full to overflowing with four shut in where one should be ——"

Kansas took a swift step forward and clutched

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Ross's arm in his strength of a new idea. "Doc, ain't Mr. Scudder's door always kept shut 'n' locked?"

"Always."

"Well, see here. What's th' matter with this? Put Dad in th' doctor's room and keep the door shut as usual. Don't let the men know anything about 'im. Let 'em go on diggin' up at Seven. That'll keep the camp from fightin', and give us a few hours—'r days," with a glance at Dad's unconscious form, "t' think things out 'nd git Jean out of danger and away from Gales Ridge. I can tell th' Greasers what t' do, and I can manage Mucker."

Ross seized Kansas' hand. "You've hit it!" he whispered excitedly. "That's the very thing. That's the way to work it! We'll hide Dad for a while."

The manifest admiration in his tones brought a pleasant smile to Kansas' face as he returned the hand-clasp. Then he turned and spoke to the Mexicans. Next, with a word to Ross, he disappeared into the stage trail to see if the way was clear. While he was gone Ross bent over the unconscious man again.

"Poor old Dad," he whispered. "I never thought that finding you was going to make things worse all the way around—and Kansas

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might just as well have kept still and not raised a hand to rescue you—only that's not Kansas!"

Now that Ross was awake to the new conditions, his thoughts leaped ahead and he saw that, while the plan proposed by Kansas presented many present difficulties and abounded in promises of future complications, it seemed the most feasible way out of immediate dangers. There was no time to spend, however, in discussing details. When Kansas returned he talked again to the Mexicans and then one of them went back to repeat his directions to those left behind with Rodrigo, while Ross took his place as burden bearer and Kansas kept ahead to assure them of a clear coast. This was made easier by the dense banks of clouds that had rolled over the cañon, darkening the moon. It was three o'clock in the morning, and a cold rain had commenced to fall.

Ross removed his slicker and threw it over Dad. Then he climbed Gales Ridge, his thoughts going forward uneasily to the room with the locked door. Thoughts of the action necessary to gain an entrance to that room caused him to swallow repeatedly. He still stood in awe of Dr. Scudder.

Gales Ridge was apparently uninhabited, and the party reached the shack on the ledge without having been discovered. They laid Dad on the

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floor of the office, wrapped blankets about him and then Kansas, not daring to trust the Mexicans with the secret of his hiding-place, shook hands with them gravely and pointing with many gesticulations toward the summit of the ridge, disappeared in the darkness. His employees looked after him uncertainly. They did not know that Jean was inside the shack. They supposed that Kansas had him in hiding some place beyond Gales Ridge and that Kansas had gone now to join him. They would have liked to go also, but were restrained by the fact that the mountains afforded no food, and Kansas had assured them of food and safety if they but followed his directions. Therefore, when they could hear his footsteps no longer, they retraced their steps down the trail in accordance with the commands he had given them.

As soon as they were gone, Kansas came stealing into the shack again from the shelter of the pines behind Wort's cabin, where he had been hiding. At once Ross and he advanced on the locked door, and without ceremony put their shoulders against it and carried it inward, the lock broken. Still without words, they felt their way toward the bed and, lifting the sleeper, carried him out and dumped him on the floor of the kitchen. Closing the kitchen door behind them, they bore Dad into the bedroom and laid him on the bed. They un-

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dressed him and then, screening the window with a blanket and lighting the lamp, Ross, for the second time that night, found his medical knowledge inadequate. Dad breathed, but Ross could not restore him to consciousness.

The knowledge of his ignorance brought him face to face with his determination to bring Dr. Scudder to his senses even at the risk of incurring his enmity. Waiting only to assure himself that Jean still slept under the influence of the opiate, although his fever was mounting, Ross and Kansas turned their attention to the doctor. They worked rapidly, for daybreak was approaching, when Kansas must go into hiding. They dragged the doctor, partially aroused now and gasping his protests, out on the ledge and proceeded to dash icy water over him. It was a rough but absolutely necessary treatment. It was also necessary that he should not be allowed to make any noise that would attract the attention of a chance man on the trail, and when he began to struggle and would have cried out in fear and wrath, Ross reluctantly grasped his throat and, shaking him into silence, impressed on him the fact that the process would be repeated if he did not keep still. Then his captors dragged him to his feet and compelled him, dripping and shivering, to walk between them back and forth on the ledge while the damp,

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snow-chilled wind bit into their very bones and the rain slanted against them with the force of a sleet. Back and forth they hurried for half an hour, Ross's hand still menacing the throat of the doctor, whose drug-befogged brain could not yet grasp a reason for such usage.

"I know it's rough treatment," Ross muttered to him between clenched teeth, "but it's got to be. Two men are here injured. They need you, and it's your business to be fit to help them."

Over and over he made this appeal to the professional instincts of the man, but the result was not encouraging. He had been poisoning his brain for too long a period for it to respond readily even to the treatment to which the two men were subjecting him.

"I don't dare keep this thing up much longer," Ross whispered to Kansas, finally. "He's evidently not strong at the best, and his indulgence of the last few days has made him a mere rag. First thing I know I'll have another sick man on my hands instead of a doctor to help out!"

Kansas looked up at the eastern sky anxiously. "The night shift from Seven 'll be coming back any time now, and I've got t' lay low. I'm sorry, Doc—I don't like t' leave ye ——"

"Of course you must," said Ross decisively. "And I must look out now for Jean. And you'll

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have to go over things with Hank again so he will understand about Dad."

They took the doctor back into his room, got him into dry clothes and dumped him, dazed still and shivering, into his easy chair beside the table that held the broken hypodermic syringe which stood for the wrecking of his profession and his home, his health and his will power. He sank back in the blanket which Ross had wrapped about him, his head rolled helplessly over one shoulder, his sensitive face drawn, his chin dropped and his mouth agape, his long delicate fingers dirty and helpless, genius drugged by habit, the most disgusting spectacle, Ross thought, that he had ever seen.

The boy leaned over Dad a minute and then turned again to the easy chair. "Do you know," he burst out finally, "I feel like kicking him! I'd like to rope him and tie him and put him into a sanitorium where they treat such men. We need him about as badly as it's possible and—look at him!"

The doctor began to snore, long gurgling gasping snores. Ross, with disgust written on every feature, lowered the back of the Morris chair, put the helpless head in an easier position, threw another blanket over him and left him, twisting and jerking uneasily and nervously. The rough

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treatment to which he had been subjected had broken through his deepest stupor.

"Better let 'im sleep a while, and then pour hot coffee down 'im," Kansas advised as Ross left the room.

By six o'clock the shack had assumed a normal aspect outwardly as Harve and Boots came in to report progress to Ross; Hank, to whom Kansas had made necessary explanations, was getting breakfast stolidly and with as much racket as he could compass in his deaf state. This was to divert attention from any possible sounds issuing from the room which held Jean and Kansas and Mucker. The door of this room was closed as usual. So was the doctor's, but his snores were audible. Jean still slept. Dad still breathed.

"Well," Ross called before Boots and Harve reached the door, "what's the news?"

He had opened the drafts of the stove and stood over it with the same restful feeling as he would have had on the rim of an active volcano. A wet broom and a pail of dirty water occupied the center of the floor, ostentatiously proclaiming that the floor was wet because of a recent scrubbing. Ross did not care to have the experience with Fatty repeated. But his visitors were so tired and sleepy they could scarcely keep their eyes open, let alone observing housekeeping operations.

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"The best news fer us," returned Boots in answer to Ross's question, "is that we're goin' t' git a snatch of sleep now. It'll be th' first I've had in forty-eight hours."

He leaned against the door-jamb and pressed a hand over his eyes, adding, "Every one's about all in, what with the Fourth 'n' then this. It'll take two days t' break int' Seven, and when we git there ——" He threw out both hands.

"And Kansas?" asked Ross huskily. "Did you run on his trail, either of you?"

"Nope," briefly, "but Harve here put 'im up t' th' sheriff, and I expect Wyomin' is bein' combed fer 'im right now."

In the midst of this speech Ross's ears, strained backward, caught a moan from his room and his heart crowded into his throat. If Jean came out of his stupor while the men were there, the whole precarious scheme might fall through.

"I do believe," exclaimed Ross loudly, on the heels of Boots' words, "I do believe that Hank gets noisier every day of his life."

He stepped back and slammed the kitchen door, whereupon the clattering of pots and pans became louder.

"How's the upper camp coming on?" he then asked as carelessly as he was able. "Helping, are they?"

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Boots scowled although he nodded, "Yep, they're on the job."

"Good for the upper camp!" exclaimed Ross, with a show of enthusiasm.

Boots' scowl deepened. He did not meet Ross's eyes. "Oh—yes, they're workin' well enough—now," shortly.

"They're usin' their tongues—some of 'em—faster'n their hands," added Harve. "Ye see it's got on their nerve—yer sendin' fer Razorback. That's what's eatin' 'em now. They know if Razorback gits here he'll prove Dad's claim on Seven is right."

"Oh!" exclaimed Ross, and the exclamation was almost a groan. He had found that letter, and the camps' knowledge of it confronting him at every turn, sometimes for the good of all concerned, but now —

"Jest ye wait 'til Dad's found," threatened Boots darkly from the door stone, "and then we'll settle with th' upper camp!"

Ross, conscious of Dad's presence a dozen feet away, shivered.

Just then voices were heard on the trail and Boots and Harve ran out on the ledge. Ross followed more slowly. He knew what was coming, and his knees had a tendency to give way. Suppose, after all, neither he nor Kansas had

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rightly read the men's attitude toward the Greasers!

Up the trail noisily, according to Kansas' directions, although the noise was somewhat forced, came the Mexicans, bearing the sick Rodrigo.

"The Greasers!" shouted Boots. "Kansas' Greasers! Where'd they come from? How'd they git Rod off'n Dundee? Where'd they leave Kansas?"

Hearing the voices, the Mexicans looked up, saw the Americans who had fired on the Browns, faltered and turned back.

With a bound Ross pushed ahead of Boots and Harve, shouting, "Come back, here!"

He ran, gesticulating frantically as he called. The Mexicans paused uncertainly. They did not understand the words, but the gestures carried a meaning.

Ross turned to the Americans. "They're afraid of you. Let me go down and fetch 'em up. They know me. I guess they're bringing Rodrigo to me to be doctored. It looks that way. They trust me, and they're afraid of you."

"We ain't out after their hides!" cried Boots. "They're nothin' but paid Greasers," contemptuously. "Git 'em t' come back, and we can find out where Kansas has gone."

Ross, relieved by this assurance, led the way,

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motioning to the Mexicans. He was followed closely by Boots and Harve, who excitedly overwhelmed them with questions which they could not understand. They talked volubly, however, pointing to the top of Gales Ridge just as Kansas had pointed, and in their jargon were the repeated names of Kansas and Jean. This the Gales Ridge men understood, but the rest of the talk was lost on them. Kansas had directed them, in case they found any one who understood them, to tell all they knew about the affair, except the rescue of Dad. They were to leave out all reference to Dad, which would lead to leaving out all reference to Ross. Kansas had given them these directions confidently, knowing that he and Jean were the only ones in Miners' who could make much headway in understanding the Mexicans or being understood by them. Therefore, when he told them they might tell how they had escaped and lead any one to the mouth of the natural tunnel, he knew that it would be some time before, by the use of patience and the sign language, the Americans would be much wiser than they were now. He also instructed his employees to trust Doc Tenderfoot.

Therefore, after having in vain tried to make the men understand about the passage by which they had escaped, they turned to Ross. He

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directed them in gestures to carry Rodrigo into the office and lay him on a bench, and then to go up to the bunk house with Boots and Harve. He drew a long breath of relief when one more step in the plan was successfully taken and he was left alone with Rodrigo.

His relief, however, was short lived, for, as he stopped a moment to make the Mexican more comfortable, suspicious sounds began to penetrate the office. The doctor was coming out of his stupor, amazed at finding another man in his bed. It was evident, also, despite the closed doors, that Jean Brown was delirious. Ross was needed in three rooms at once, and needed badly. Alarmed and distracted, he had opened the doctor's door when he heard the most alarming sound of all—men's voices again outside the shack.

He slammed the doctor's door and opened the outer door. Some of the Gales Ridge shift who had been at work on the wreck of Seven all night were turning in leisurely beneath the pines bound for the office. For a moment Ross's legs as well as his brain refused to work. His imagination only was active, and showed him Kansas captured in the heart of the hostile camp, the discovery of Dad and the immediate clash between the camps. At his own dilemma his imagination balked. As a neutral playing between the camps he would be

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more than discredited because no one would believe his good intentions except Dad—and Dad might never be conscious enough to defend him.

At this instant Dr. Scudder's dull, unsteady voice reached him. "Why—here's a man—it's Dad! What's doing here—now, I wonder——"

Then Ross's legs moved. They carried him in the direction of the pines. His brain worked also. He called hastily :

"See here, boys! I've got a sick man in here, and no place to put him except the office. They'll tell you all about it up at the bunk house. It's Rodrigo. The Mexicans from Eight brought him in. They say that the Browns went over in that direction," pointing up the side of Gales Ridge. "But tell the boys not to come in here again until I give the word. Dr. Scudder's useless; I've got to take care of Rodrigo, and it won't do to have the door flying open on him in this wind and rain."

The shift scarcely waited to yell, "All right. We'll tell 'em," so anxious were they to reach the bunk house, the Mexicans and additional information. The rear man stopped though to call back with a scowl, "While we're gittin' shet of disagreeable parties in Miners' we might as well send that good-fer-nothin' doctor down the trail!"

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Ross, without replying, hurried back to the office, closed the door and propped it shut with a bench. He also closed the two half sashes by which sounds might escape. Hope revived and lent him strength and steadiness. The injunction he had laid on the men, and the explanation leading to it was too sensible and casual to excite any suspicions. Resolutely shutting out the thought of further difficulties, he gave his entire attention to the work in hand and spent a strenuous hour unsustained by the breakfast he could not take time to eat. He hurried into the doctor's room first and found him clinging shakily to the head of the bed, while he looked at Dad with a glimmer of professional interest. There was also a faint exhibition of pride in the pains he took to enunciate distinctly the single question, "Sick?" as Ross entered.

The boy leaned over Dad and replied slowly that every word might pierce the dulled intelligence of the physician: "He's not conscious, Dr. Scudder, and I can't revive him. You must. Understand? I want you to find out what's the matter with him. He's alive, but that's all I know about it."

Without waiting for further developments he raced through the kitchen and burst into the lean-to where Kansas stood over his brother holding him in the bunk and attempting to keep him

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quiet. Mucker sat in a corner playing with the jack-knife Kansas had given him, and eating candy.

"Doc," said Kansas in a low, despairing tone, "it's no use. The game's up! Jean's bad off, and I can't keep 'im still. He'll be heard and ——"

"I can put him to sleep again," said Ross hurriedly. "It's necessary, and I've got to do it. Dr. Scudder is coming to himself, and I've hit on a plan to keep the men out of the way—and," stoutly, "the game isn't up."

In a few words he told how he had warned the men out of the office and then taking Kansas' place beside the bunk, directed him to go into the doctor's room, dose the latter with strong coffee and feed him also with the situation as he was able to take it in, and get him if possible at work on Dad.

"By that time I'll be there with you," added Ross. "I don't know enough about this business to know how quickly we can get either his mind or his fingers to working."

Kansas turned toward the door. "All right, Doc. I'll see what I can do with Dr. Scudder."

Even in the stress of the moment Ross noticed that Kansas did not abbreviate the man's title, and spoke of him only indirectly in disrespect.

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Dr. Scudder had a personality which commanded a species of awe, despite his habit.

That morning was the longest and most trying that Ross had ever experienced. Had it not been for Kansas he would have "exploded into inch pieces," as he said later, so distracted was he by a realization of the needs of Jean and Dad and the utter inability of the doctor to rise to those needs.

"I feel," he told Kansas desperately, "as though I must knock Dr. Scudder down and pound him into action! If only he could revive Dad enough so that he could be told of the whole affair and could talk and think, I know Dad would find a way out for us all."

"For you, perhaps," Kansas muttered.

Ross turned on him quickly. "You don't know Dad if you think he wouldn't work like a trooper to save you and Jean—just as you saved him—I know he would. That's Dad every time. He'll fight you when you're in a position to be fought, but when he sees you down and out—well, you wait! If only we can bring him—back—you'll see I'm right."

Kansas made no reply, and they continued to labor with the doctor. They threatened and cajoled him. They gave him strong coffee. They stood him in front of the open sash with the wind in his face. They pleaded with him to

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exert himself, while they walked the floor dragging him between them, his fine eyes vacant, his numbed will making vain efforts to regain its normal control of his wrecked body. Finally their efforts were rewarded to the extent that he was able to attempt an examination of Dad.

Meanwhile the rain had ceased, and the sun shone into the cañon. The Gales Ridge day shift, accompanied by the Mexicans, had gone down the trail without stopping at the office. The mountains echoed only with the blasts from the wreckage at Seven. The company mines stood idle. Both camps worked in Dundee with an outward show of harmony while the man they were digging to find was coming slowly back to consciousness under the uncertain directions and ministrations of a physician whose brain was not yet clear and whose nerves were again demanding the stimulant which had been pitched out of the window.

When the clock on a shelf over the bed struck twelve, to Ross's relief, Dad's eyes opened languidly. He did not speak but, rolling his head over, looked at Ross and moved his lips. The boy leaned over and exclaimed joyfully :

"Hang on to yourself, Dad, and stay awake. You'll be talking in a few minutes."

Then he tore himself away from the room and

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started for the lean-to, leaving Dr. Scudder sitting on the side of the bed, his fingers on the sick man's pulse, while Kansas stood beside him.

Presently the doctor arose and going to the medicine cupboard in the office returned with a bottle containing a liquid that in the sunlight shone like amber. With an unsteady hand he drained his coffee cup, and raised the bottle. As he tipped it over the cup his hand lurched and the contents of the bottle slopped freely into the cup. Holding it unsteadily he made his way carefully toward the bed. Kansas, anticipating his intention, lifted Dad's head carefully. Dr. Scudder advanced the cup, Kansas' steady hand closed over his, and together they had brought the portion to the sick man's lips just as Ross entered the room.

The boy gave one glance at the bottle and one at the cup and then, with an inarticulate cry of terror, he leaped at the bed and struck down the cup, involuntarily hurling the doctor back against the table.

"Don't swallow that!" Ross shouted hoarsely. *"Listen, Dad! Don't swallow!"* Then to Kansas, as he raised Dad to a sitting posture, "Water."

Dr. Scudder fell back against the table, hitting his head a numbing blow on the edge. He lay there a moment unnoticed, and then slowly

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crawled to his knees and from there up into his Morris chair. He pressed his shaking hands a moment against his aching head and then reached for the bottle and for the first time read its label aright, "Sol. Ars." The trembling in his hands passed through his entire body. He looked at the bed where Ross was forcing Dad to rinse out his mouth again and again. Then his head sank to his arms on the table.

"What is it?" asked Kansas in an agitated voice.

"Enough arsenic to put you and a few more like you out of commission," answered Ross bluntly. "How he ever came to land on Solution of Arsenic is beyond me — Oh!" in sudden enlightenment he turned to the doctor, "you were after a stimulant, aromatic spirits of ammonia, weren't you?"

There was a feeble assent from the bowed head, and Ross plunged into the office, produced the stimulant and administered a spoonful to Dad. Just then Jean's voice, raised in delirium, cut through the shack, and Mucker came fearfully to the door of the doctor's room.

"I'm afraid," whimpered Mucker. "I'm goin' out. *He* makes a awful noise."

Kansas laid a strong hand on Mucker's shoulder. "Ye're not goin' outside that door, d'ye hear,

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Mucker?" He pointed to the outer door of the office.

Then suddenly struck by an idea, he propelled the boy into the kitchen and turned him over to Hank. Hank promptly provided him with a pair of shears and the colored pages of an Eastern Sunday paper, and Mucker, contented, settled down beside the table and soon had a gay array of paper figures standing up in the cracks between the rough pine boards.

Meantime Ross had hurried to Jean, and found him standing in the middle of the floor, flushed and wild eyed, gesticulating with his sound arm and insisting that Dad had no idea he was daily walking over a crevice which cut the tunnel of Eight.

"His fever's sky high," said Ross to Kansas who followed him. "He's got to have help, but where from?"

Kansas' face fell into heavy lines. "Not from a doctor who tries t' pour arsenic down a sick man's throat!" he returned bitterly.

Together they put the delirious man back into his bunk.

"You stay with him now," said Ross, not meeting Kansas' eyes, "and do—what you can to keep him still."

Kansas searched the boy's face. "Doc, can't ye

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give 'im more of that?" He motioned toward the hypodermic needle that lay on the table.

"I don't dare give him any more inside of—say two hours, Kansas. I don't dare. It might be safe; an experienced doctor would know what to do, but I don't. I've come to the end of my rope with him."

Kansas said no more, but his face was gray as he bent over Jean and spoke soothingly to him, while Ross returned to Dad, who had fallen again into a stupor. But his heart action was stronger and his breath came more regularly. Encouraged by these signs Ross worked over him feverishly, for in his intelligent coöperation only, it seemed to the boy, lay the safety of the Browns. Every time Jean's voice was raised irrepressibly, Ross's heart stood still. That delirious shout might be heard as far away as the trail, and it was only a matter of hours when there would be ears on the trail to hear. If only Dad would recover sufficiently to listen and take command! He had evidently been stunned by the explosion and suffocated by the foul air of the tunnel. His recovery was only a matter of a short time, but time was precious with matters in their present state, and Dr. Scudder, his head on his arms, his body shaken by long, shuddering breaths, refused to move or speak.

"Dad, can you hear me?" Ross implored a

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dozen times during the afternoon, and a dozen times Dad's eyes opened and closed again—his only reply—while from the lean-to arose the strength of voice that Dad lacked, and a fatal strength it must prove to be shortly, when the day shift came back from Dundee and the night shift went trooping down past Wort's shack.

The clock was striking five when Kansas called sharply from the kitchen, "Doc, ye must give Jean somethin' t' keep 'im still—ye *must*!" desperately.

Ross drew a long breath and went to the medicine cupboard. He found a bottle and carried it into the lean-to. Kansas, the perspiration running down his pale face, was holding Jean in the bunk by main force and covering his mouth with a necessarily harsh hand to stifle his hoarse shouts. Ross approached the bunk and stopped.

"Kansas," he said hesitatingly, "if you say so I'll give your brother this knock-out dose. I don't know, mind, whether I ought to or not—he's had some stiff doses already through the needle."

"Something's got t' be done, Doc." Kansas wiped away the sweat from his face. "He'll be heard and then ——" He did not finish.

Ross held the cup to the sick man's lips and he was finally induced to drink.

Shortly after the opiate began to take effect. With unspeakable relief Kansas saw Jean's frantic

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struggles weaken, his bloodshot eyes close, his hoarse rantings sink to mutters. To Ross, however, the moments were full of anxiety. He stood with his fingers on Jean's unsteady pulse, his forehead creased in a vain effort to recall any instructions his uncle might have given him to apply in such a case.

Kansas, wandering about the room, came to the shelf on which lay the Book of Forgetfulness. He picked it up abstractedly and opened it. Then, seeing by the penmanship inside that it was private, he hastily restored it to the shelf, saying awkwardly, "I didn't know, Doc, that it wa'n't fer general readin'."

"Look it over," urged Ross, "and I'll tell you what it is—I'd like to."

He turned to the telling with relief, a respite from the nightmare of suspense and anxiety which held the shack in its thrall. He soon had Kansas listening with interest and, presently, he found that beneath the relaxed pressure of his fingers Jean's pulse was becoming steadier. Therefore, from the story of the Book of Forgetfulness and his father's connection with it, he went on to tell Kansas all he knew about Razorback Jones, and how MacFadden must have been sneaking to have found out the few facts on which he had built the story that was believed by both camps.

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"I tell you, Kansas," urged Ross, "Dad means to be square in everything he does. If he isn't it's because he misunderstands things."

Kansas, sitting on the corner of the bunk, made no reply at first. His face was bent over the book at the entry concerning Razorback.

"I don't just see what there is in this business of them boundaries t' misunderstand," he said finally, quietly. "When I bought Eight, the man that owned it took me to Basin and showed me th' record of Seven all set down in black and white. The chap in the office said Dad had brought it there himself. I had a surveyor make a copy of the record and then survey Eight accordingly from the rock that stood in the record ——"

"But Dad says," Ross broke in, "that when you found the stakes on Seven didn't correspond with the record you knew there was a mistake."

"I did," returned Kansas quietly, "but I reckoned th' mistake was in th' stakes and not in th' survey that Dad had *accepted himself*. Wouldn't you?"

Ross hesitated and then said in a puzzled voice, "Kansas, I don't know what I believe in the matter. When you talk I see it your way and when Dad talks I see it his way."

"I reckoned that after Dad had staked out the

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claim," Kansas continued, "he had changed his mind about th' exact location. That was the only reasonable thing to believe."

Ross made no reply. To himself he thought, "They're both equally strong in their belief. Well—what does it matter? It's a question of life and death with them both now, instead of claim owning and claim jumping."

After a moment's silence, Kansas voiced the same thought. He arose and replaced the book on the shelf. His face was gray and drawn as he stood looking out of the window at Dundee.

"Wall, Doc," he said slowly, "I guess that's all in the past. When Mucker set out t' help me—he ended things generally. If Dad lives—why—he's won out, that's all, right 'r wrong. I'm done fer on these mountings. If I can git out with my life I'm lucky, and I ain't hopin' that any too strong. But if I do git out I'll leave behind me all I'm worth—over there in Eight—and I'll leave my reputation here too—for nobody is goin' t' believe that I didn't blow up Seven."

"We'll see about that!" retorted Ross obstinately. "The world hasn't come to an end yet!"

"My world has!" said Kansas abruptly. "A man don't like t' go through life follered by th' reputation of stabbin' an enemy in th' back!"

Again Ross was silenced by the grim truth.

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He put Jean's head in a more comfortable position and left the lean-to without glancing again at the figure beside the window. But he carried with him a picture of the haggard face and the echo of Kansas' words. In the kitchen Mucker was busily and happily engaged in cutting out his paper figures and sticking them into the cracks of the wall, having covered the table.

"I found a match," Mucker proclaimed proudly to Ross, "and I helped Kansas, I did!"

Ross scarcely heard the boast. The sight of the boy impressed him anew with the fact that although the half-wit had demolished Kansas' plans and ruined his future, Kansas had cared for him and brought him to a place of safety, passing the entire matter over without a word of blame—and it was Kansas who had rescued Dad.

"If Dad had been left until the men could reach him from the mouth of the tunnel he would have been found dead," Ross was thinking when Mucker's speech arrested his attention.

"I want Bill t' see these," said the boy. "I hear 'im a-comin' and I want 'im to see."

"Bill!" exclaimed Ross in dismay. He came back with a rude jolt to the immediate present and its perils. "I had forgotten the stage—and the mail—it's stage night."

He rushed through the office and out on the

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ledge. What should he do? The mail must be distributed, and yet it must not be brought into the office. There was Wort's cabin! He could use that as a post-office, but he was expected to deal out the mail in person. The men were accustomed to coming and going all the evening—and yet his presence in the shack was necessary. What should he do?

He stopped at Wort's cabin and looked back. It was perilously near the office and Jean's voice. The opiate was sure to wear off before the mail could be distributed, and he dare not administer another dose.

Far down the cañon came Bill Travers' raucous cries of "Hi there, kittens, git out o' this! Pick up yer heels, ye rascals! Hit th' hike!"

The "kittens," thus persuaded, brought the stage into view. It crawled forward to the foot of the Gales Ridge trail and stopped. Ross looked down at it with strained eyes. Suddenly he gasped and dashed his hand across his eyes in the suspicion that they were playing him false. Then he raced down the trail with a ringing shout.

Climbing stiffly out of the stage was Dr. Gaynor of the University Hospital, and with him was Dr. Scudder's brother.

CHAPTER XVI

"THE FIFTY-FIFTY"

As Ross hurried down the trail, fragments of his interview with Dr. Gaynor in April stood forth vividly: the latter's hesitation in speaking of Dr. Scudder, together with certain unfinished sentences such as, "Grant, Dr. Scudder is a ——" also the surgeon's incomplete declaration that he intended to go to Wyoming in the summer, "to make one more attempt ——"

This, in April, had meant nothing to Ross. Now, in the light of his knowledge of Dr. Scudder's habits, he saw in a flash what the end of those sentences would have been, and what the two men had come prepared to attempt.

As the surgeon alighted from the stage, his squarely-built, strong figure, his well-set, graying head, his broad shoulders and calm manner made him look to the boy like a heaven-sent bulwark against the floods of disaster that were threatening to overwhelm the inhabitants of the shack. He felt like throwing up his cap and yelling in joyful abandon, but before he had an opportunity even

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to greet his guests, Bill bawled excitedly over his shoulder as he was lifting the mail-bag out of the stage :

"Hey, Doc, have you heard anything from Dad or got wind of Kansas?"

The boy's rapid pace slackened, and for a breathless moment he was tongue-tied. It was only when Bill repeated his inquiry that he found his voice and a satisfactory evasion :

"The men haven't reported anything from either of them," he declared, and added hastily : "You needn't come up, Bill. I can manage the mail-bag and these bags all right."

Bill nodded and drove on to MacFadden's store, anxious to hear any news the latter might have picked up, leaving Ross shaking hands with the newcomers with a grasp that made them wince.

"Your grip and your face don't seem to correspond to-day," Dr. Gaynor began, rubbing the fingers of his right hand tenderly. "No one as pale and big-eyed as you are ought to have such a hand on you!"

"What's the trouble here, Grant?" asked Scudder directly. "We have been hearing rumors of trouble ever since we left Meeteetse this morning. Who has done what, and how?"

"There isn't time to explain much or to mince matters," Ross replied hurriedly. "We're in a

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dickens of a scrape here, and Dr. Scudder isn't in any condition to help out ——"

Mr. Scudder's eyes and the surgeon's met instantly, but Ross raced on: "We've got two desperately sick men on our hands—with the camp in a turmoil."

He faced them for ten minutes, his entire attention centered on giving them the essential facts of the situation in the least time. But when he mentioned Razorback Jones the surgeon halted the rush of words with a gesture.

"'Razorback Jones,'" he repeated. "A name like that isn't easily forgotten—nor such an odd character. He was the center of interest in the ward and among the staff in the hospital. We all knew Razorback."

Ross came a swift step nearer. "I've written to find out his whereabouts ——" he began. "Do you know ——"

The surgeon interrupted briefly: "He's dead. Died weeks ago. I don't know when."

Ross fell back. "Dead!" he burst out. "Dead—and with this boundary all unsettled—but then—I mustn't stop over him now. We haven't a minute to spare."

He took up his story again where Dr. Gaynor had broken it off. In his anxiety he lost sight of the age and position of the surgeon and thought

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of him only as an instrument to be used in bettering "the dickens of a scrape."

"There are two things for you to do right away," he ended. "Jean must be kept quiet—and Dad made able to talk."

A queer expression flashed over the surgeon's face as he quietly took this unconsciously forceful order from the first year student whom he had known only as Number 10 until the letter from Dr. Scudder had introduced him as "Doc Tenderfoot." The expression twitched at his lips and died away as he noticed the hollows beneath the boy's eyes and the nervous tension of his bearing. "Very well," he said gravely, "I'll do what I can."

Then the expression returned suddenly and twitched his lips into a pleasant smile as Ross, slinging the mail-bag over his shoulder, picked up a suit case, saying awkwardly but fervently :

"I tell you what! you look pretty good to me to-day!"

Then he hurried up the trail in advance of the others, dropped the mail-bag in front of Wort's cabin, ran into the doctor's shack, informed Kansas briefly of the new arrivals and was out on the ledge again in time to meet them, and tell the surgeon just how he had handled Dad and what opiates he had given Jean.

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"Jean's getting noisy again," he exclaimed breathlessly. "You must keep him quiet if it can be done, because Kansas' life depends on the secrecy of his hiding-place. And you see I've got to distribute the mail right here at the end of the ledge so I can stand the men off from going into the shack. Kansas will show you where the medicines are and the bandages and everything."

Suddenly checking himself he blushed furiously, stammering, "I guess I'm talking pretty fresh, but there's an awful lot depending on you."

Neither man made any reply, the mountain climb having made them breathless, but Dr. Gaynor smiled and dismissed the idea of "freshness" with a wave of his hand, while Mr. Scudder's eyes met Ross's in a friendly fashion as the two disappeared inside the shack.

Ross dumped the mail-bag on Wort's door stone and began to sort the contents. Several times Jean's hoarse cries reached him, bearing frantically the name of "Kansas." A bundle of newspapers slipped from the young postmaster's fingers. He looked up and down the trail nervously and listened for the sound of footsteps that would also indicate listening ears, but the mountainside seemed lifeless and Jean's voice finally died away.

Presently the day shift came down the cañon and climbed the Gales Ridge trail. They were

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talking angrily. When they swarmed about the impromptu postmaster they were too absorbed in the object of their anger to notice that his hands shook and that he did not seem able to read readily the plainest directions. Stooping over the door stone, the men pulled letters and papers hither and thither in search of their own in a way that would have horrified a postal inspector. It soon appeared from their conversation that they were wrought up to concert pitch by an open clash between the owners of two claims, situated below Seven and Eight respectively. The two men had been separated, but ugly things had been said which threatened to precipitate a fight between the two camps.

"We're takin' more of their tongue than we would if 'twa'n't that ye're after Razorback Jones," Boots explained. "I tell th' boys that if we set tight 'til he gits here —— Ye've sent a letter after him, hain't ye?" he broke off to ask.

Ross gulped and stooping tightened his shoe lacing. If the hope of Razorback's coming acted as a brake on the men's violence he would not yet destroy the hope. Therefore he muttered, "Yes, I sent off a letter about him—on the last stage."

"I won't stand fer much more from 'em," Harve broke out sullenly, "Razorback 'r no Razorback. They can stop talkin' to-morrow 'r ——"

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"What about Seven?" Ross hastened to interrupt. "How near the mouth of the tunnel are you?"

"It's been a shorter job than anybody reckoned on," returned Boots. "We found the trees over the tunnel had sort of held up the rocks and dirt so we could dig easier'n we expected. With good luck we'll open up the tunnel to-morrow night. But if Dad's there he's likely passed in his checks before this," and Boots turned away abruptly.

"Once we find out about Dad," added Harve resentfully, "we needn't be beholden t' th' upper camp no longer."

The day shift, bearing their mail, went on up the trail, leaving Ross shivering on the door stone. He supposed that his chills were merely the result of sitting outdoors without his sweater. The disappearing sun was withdrawing its warmth and bringing in the train of its setting the icy breezes from the peaks. He hugged his arms against his sides, determined to stick to his post until the mail had all been distributed, thus guarding against the chance of Kansas being seen in the shack. So excited were the men over the rising enmity between the camps that no one had thought to inquire about Rodrigo, whose sickness was the ostensible cause of the temporary outdoor post-office.

Ross sat hunched up on the stone thinking of

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the morrow's meeting of the camps and the work on Dundee. He knew that the opened tunnel of Seven would reveal the way through the floor into the natural passage beneath the tunnel. He had not heard whether the Mexicans had made themselves understood as to where they had been hiding, but when the Americans discovered the natural passage they would understand how Dad had escaped. They would also know that he had been carried out injured and had not walked out or he would have put in an appearance before this at Gales Ridge. Then the rescuers would turn on the Mexicans for an explanation, and they would be frightened into giving it in full, and some one would be found who could understand and interpret. That explanation would involve him, Ross—and what then?

He dropped his head wearily on his hand. Thinking had become increasingly difficult. He could follow this line of reasoning no further. All he could do was to cling to the hope that Dr. Gaynor would succeed in bringing Dad far enough back to consciousness and strength to understand the situation and plan to meet it. What the injured man could do or would be willing to do he could not guess. Whether Dad would believe that Kansas did not blow up the tunnel was another grave conjecture which oppressed him.

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Just as the last rays of the sun were painting the sky in gorgeous colors, and the rising wind was cutting through Ross's shirt sleeves like a knife, Mr. Scudder appeared in hat and top coat, bearing a plate of food and a sweater. The sight of his face, on which good news was written, revived the boy more than the sight of Hank's steaming supper.

"That chap you call Kansas," murmured Scudder, with a hasty look around, "told me you'd have to stay here the most of the evening. He sent these things to you."

"Thank you," said Ross gratefully. Then he asked eagerly, "How are things going in there?"

"All right," heartily. "We've got the fellow in my brother's room ——"

"Dad Page," supplemented Ross.

"Yes; well, Gaynor's got Dad Page fully awake ——"

Ross checked a joyful shout.

"—— and the other one fully asleep, but he's in bad shape."

"Jean? Yes, I know he is."

"Gaynor says that when you get through here so you can help—he thinks the bullet is just below the skin. The arm is pretty lean—and if my brother can be made fit to help also ——"

Ross nodded and moved along on the door

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stone. Mr. Scudder sat down. A change came over his sensitive face. He drew his hat over his high forehead as a screen against the frost-bitten wind and at the same time Ross felt the invisible wall between them behind which Dr. Scudder was accustomed to take refuge. Mr. Scudder, the successful lawyer, was the counterpart of Dr. Scudder, the unsuccessful surgeon, with the one exception which had made the one and unmade the other—the lawyer was master of his appetites.

“Grant,” he began quietly, “tell me, please, all that you know of my brother. Just now he is in a strange state of terror. What has happened?”

Ross thought a moment, puzzled. Then, “Oh,” he exclaimed, “the poison! I didn’t have time to tell you about that down in the cañon.”

They talked in an undertone while darkness fell and the wind soughed through the pines above them and shadowy figures crunched up and down the trail, pausing at the impromptu post-office while Ross struck a match and identified the figure and the mail belonging to it. They talked long after the mail had all disappeared. And as the older man realized the younger’s attitude of concern, and the way he was shouldering, as a matter of course, responsibilities which belonged to the camp doctor and not to his assistant, the screen of reserve dissolved and Mr. Scudder found

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himself talking more freely of his brother than he had talked for years except to Gaynor.

"There are a wife and two children that any man might be proud of," he said finally, "and he is devoted to them—*after his appetite!* He has come to be more devoted to that than to anything else on earth."

"He was awfully cut up over that 'Papa Scudder' letter," returned Ross slowly. "I think that and my distrusting him as a surgeon brought on his outburst to me last night about his habits."

"What do you mean by distrusting him as a surgeon?"

Ross related the incident connected with his examination of Mucker's head. "The two jolts coming together," added the boy, "sort of knocked him out of himself so he could see himself as he is for a few minutes. He said he was beyond helping himself. He said that there was only one way to cure him and no one had the power to do it——"

"What way?" quickly.

"Well, he said he was beyond curing himself, voluntarily, you know. That the only way was for some one to 'rope him and throw him,' as they say in this country, 'and make him quit,' but that no one had the authority to do it."

"Did he really say that—suggest it?" exclaimed the brother.

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Ross nodded.

Mr. Scudder took his head between his hands, his elbows on his knees. There ensued a long pause. From Seven came a blast that echoed among the peaks. Mr. Scudder arose. His voice had in it a peculiar ring well known to his brother lawyers in Philadelphia. It was the note which crept into his tones when he saw his way to the successful end of a case.

"We'll see!" he said grimly. "He has thrown himself and given me the rope to tie him! We'll see. It's a drastic measure, but he'll thank me for it—later." The speaker hesitated, and then added in a lower tone, "He's worth it, too. If you had known him ten years ago, Grant, you'd not doubt me. We were all proud of him. He promised to be a leader in surgery—and now—look at him—an opium fiend!"

Nothing more was said. Ross, wondering how the doctor had provided a rope for his brother's use, and what the drastic measure was, followed into the office. He had occupied Wort's door stone for four hours, and during that time the very atmosphere of the doctor's shack had changed. The boy felt the renewed life and hope that the surgeon had brought, and he drew a long breath of relief.

The office was lighted and Dr. Gaynor was kneeling in front of the bench on which Rodrigo

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lay, examining the burned arm. On one end of the bench sat Mucker, sucking a stick of candy with much noise and content, smiling vacantly into the surgeon's face.

"This is the boy you spoke of?" asked Scudder in a low tone.

Ross nodded. He merely glanced at Mucker, so occupied was he in accounting for all the occupants of the shacks. The bedroom door stood open. That room was dark but there issued therefrom a murmur of voices, one weak and halting. "Dr. Scudder must be in there talking to Dad," Ross thought. He had started for the bedroom when the surgeon's voice called him back to the bench.

Dr. Gaynor was examining the Mexican's arm with the gentleness of sympathy and the keen interest of a man who glories in his work.

"Grant, come here," he commanded, and Ross obeyed as befitted Number 10 called by his chief. Then his heart swelled as the surgeon went on, "Young man, you told me once you had never led your classes. Well, you'll get to the head of your profession all right if you do all your work as carefully as you've done this," indicating the unbandaged arm.

The embryo surgeon blushed and stammered and could find nothing better to say than, "I fixed him up as well as I knew how, sir."

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Then astonishment swallowed up his embarrassment, for, chancing to glance into the kitchen where Hank was mixing bread for the morrow's baking, he saw Dr. Scudder bending over the stove stirring something in a basin. It was not he, then, talking to Dad—it was—it must be—Kansas. He stepped toward the bedroom door and found the doorway mixed up curiously with the medicine cupboard beside it. He steadied himself against the cupboard waiting for that queer feeling to pass. He pressed his hand over his eyes. He'd never had any trouble with them before, but the room was hot——

Just then Dad's weak voice came to him: "Better go tell Doc, Kansas. That'd make him feel mighty easy-like in his mind."

Here the surgeon and the ceiling logs mixed themselves up promiscuously. Ross made an inarticulate sound and saw three men springing toward him, the surgeon, the lawyer and Kansas. The next thing he knew he lay in Hank's bunk behind the kitchen stove with Dr. Gaynor holding a cup to his lips.

"Now, my boy," said the surgeon, "you drink this, and don't let us hear anything more from you until morning."

Ross struggled to get up, saying in a dazed tone, "Aw—don't—now. You see, I'd been out in

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the cold and it was coming in where it was so hot——”

“Grant, if a few of us are obliged to sit on you to hold you down we can do it!” exclaimed Dr. Gaynor humorously. “Drink this now, and keep still.”

Ross obeyed the first order, but not the last. “I want to know something that Kansas is to tell me—and then there’s Jean.” He made a fresh effort to arise. “We’ve got to see Jean.”

“Jean is being attended to,” said Gaynor persuasively. “Dr. Scudder is on deck again, and his help is worth more even than yours, Grant, and I’m finding out what you’re worth.”

He was pressing the boy back gently into the bunk when Kansas hurried through the kitchen on his way to his brother. His lean face was smiling and his fine eyes glowing.

“Doc,” he exclaimed in a tone he sought in vain to subdue, “Dad’s awake and got a clear head. I’m just findin’ Dad out——”

The surgeon interrupted: “Keep right on finding him out, but let Grant here alone. He’s going to sleep now.”

“But, doctor,” objected Kansas eagerly, “I’d take it kind of ye if ye’d let me talk t’ him a bit——”

“No more talking to-night,” said Dr. Gaynor

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decisively. "He may be talked to all day tomorrow, but not to-night."

"But, doctor, there's a few little things ——"

"Few!" exploded Dr. Gaynor. "Why Broadway, New York, isn't a patch on this forsaken little old mountainous place for real excitement! Run along now, and let Grant here rest."

This argument reached Ross from a great distance, and the subject of Dad mixed itself up with Mucker. He insisted on telling Dr. Gaynor about the Mucker. He knew his father would finance an operation on the boy's skull, he muttered, and the surgeon could undo the work that Wort had done.

"His father hit him when he was small," he repeated drowsily, "and my—my father will pay—take him to the University Hospital and operate ——"

"See here, Grant," came the surgeon's far-away voice, "if you'll promise me you'll stay right in this bunk and stop thinking, I promise you that I'll attend to that boy's skull. Is this a bargain?"

"Shake—on—it," invited Ross, struggling for the words, and reached out a cold hand which met the surgeon's warm one over unmeasured space.

But sleep did not come at once. Ross could control his body and keep it laid out flat in the

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bunk according to directions. His mind was not so obliging. The wheels continued to buzz unconnectedly and confusedly for a few moments. He had not written to Nick yet—he must in the morning—he heard his own name finally issuing from the lean-to not half a dozen feet from where he lay. The voice belonged to Kansas, and he was telling some one somewhere about the Book of Forgetfulness — The next thing Ross knew the light was streaming into the kitchen from the sun just peeping over Dundee, and Hank was washing dishes. That was queer. He had seen Hank washing dishes only a few moments before, the supper dishes. He raised his head. It felt queer—uncertain. Oh, yes! He remembered now.

“Made a fool of myself last night,” he said aloud. “It’s the morning after now! Those are the breakfast dishes, not supper.”

He sat up and hung his feet over the edge of the bunk. No one had taken the time to remove his shoes. He was fully dressed, even to his sweater. He crawled out of the bunk and sat down on a bench beside the table. Hank, with many unintelligible sounds, set coffee and food before him.

“I feel,” said Ross, equally unintelligibly to Hank, “as though every inch of my body had been pounded, thinking apparatus and all.”

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As he drank his coffee the fog began to clear away from his "thinking apparatus" a trifle. He noticed that the door leading to the office was closed, while the lean-to door stood open. There were voices in every direction, too many voices, Ross thought languidly, but he could not arouse himself sufficiently to understand why he thought there were too many. Hank, watchful, refilled his coffee cup and as the boy was drinking the second cupful, two voices detached themselves from more distant sounds and he realized that Dr. Scudder and his brother were in Jean's room, just behind him, talking. At least, the brother was talking.

"There's a promising young doctor that Gaynor thinks would come here and take your place. His name is Lambert, and he is an intern in the University Hospital ——"

Ross stopped eating, and listened frankly and eagerly.

"—— and you will come with us," Mr. Scudder continued.

There was a sharp dissent from the brother, interrupted authoritatively by the lawyer:

"It's come to this, Eugene," said Mr. Scudder steadily. "You'll do one of two things: you'll come with us, Gaynor and me, and give yourself over into our hands unreservedly, or you'll stand

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trial here for the poison you attempted to give that man in there ——”

There was an inarticulate cry from the physician, but the lawyer's voice was grim with a sternness he was far from feeling: “Your habits have brought you to the threshold of murder. We'll call the thing by its correct name—*murder*—you, Eugene Scudder—a drunken, debauched, would-be murderer ——”

Again there was a hoarse, pain-racked cry, followed again by the steady determined voice:

“Gaynor knows of a sanatorium, just the place for you, and there you'll give up your freedom of action for a while in order to regain freedom from your awful habit. And, Eugene,” the man's voice softened, “the time will come when you'll know I'm being kind rather than cruel, and when your wife and children ——” Mr. Scudder's voice stopped abruptly, interrupted by a single groan which tore its way from the doctor's heart.

Ross, whose mind was rapidly sloughing off its stupor, dropped his head on his hand. He understood now how Dr. Scudder had furnished the rope by which he could be “thrown and tied.”

“I'm right down glad,” thought Ross, “that he stumbled on that arsenic and right down gladder that I stopped him from giving it!”

At that moment he became aware of a new and

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alarming stir in the office, sounds of boots and voices.

"It's the men!" he gasped excitedly. "What are they doing in there!"

He staggered to his feet and got to the door. Opening it, he steadied himself against it and looked in. The floor was covered with muddy tracks all leading to the bedroom. The outside door stood open. On his bench the Mexican was huddled in his blanket, his gaze turned toward the bedroom expectantly although he could understand nothing that was going on. Dr. Gaynor stood beside the medicine cupboard, his back toward Ross, attentively listening to a weak voice, Dad's voice, his hand protectingly on Mucker's head. The near presence of Wort was indicated in the boy's fear-stricken attitude as he crouched against the surgeon.

Ross crept weakly forward and stood behind Gaynor, also listening. There was a rustle inside the bedroom, the sound of many men's astonishment.

"And so, boys," Dad was ending, his voice a weak quaver, "we don't need no Razorback here to settle the boundaries. They're settled fer good, and'll stand jest where they be. It don't make no difference now whether they overlap 'r not. They ain't no longer Claims Seven 'nd Eight. I sent

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fer ye t' come and hear jest this: Kansas 'nd I are pardners now. We'll work our claims together share 'n' share alike. We're goin' t' call th' property *The Fifty-Fifty Claim*. We've fixed up th' pardnership with Dr. Scudder. He's been backin' Kansas unbeknownst to us all, and I know we can fix things up with Mr. Grant on account of young Doc here bein' with us. So, go long, boys. Every one's boundary on Dundee will stay exactly where it is now, me and Kansas bein' pards, and ——"

Dad's voice failed, and the movement in the room became general. The men filed out. MacFadden came first. Dad had evidently sent for some men from the upper camp as well as the lower. Behind the storekeeper came Boots. Boots looked as subdued as though he had seen a ghost. So did all the others as they came out.

"Pardners—Dad and Kansas!" Boots muttered, as though to accustom himself to the idea. "And it was Mucker that blowed Seven up—Dad seen 'im, but he couldn't git out of the tunnel in time after Mucker lit the fuse—who'd 'a' thought th' boy was smart enough ——"

"And Kansas carried Dad out of that tunnel," said Harve, coming after. "It was the curiourest thing the way they got shet of theirselves when we tried t' find 'em, and no one suspected another way in ——" and Harve passed out of the door.

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"And t' think of the hand Doc Tenderfoot had in the thing!" exclaimed Fatty, treading on Harve's heels. "Who would think Doc had it in 'im—and him so strict on the water wagon."

An hour later, while the stage waited at the foot of Gales Ridge, Ross wrote two letters, one to Nicholas Page, a joyful although somewhat incoherent epistle, the second, a brief note to his father concerning the new partnership.

The shack was quiet, its very atmosphere charged with peace and calm. In the doctor's bedroom Dad slept, wearied by the exertion of talking with the men. In the lean-to Jean, in a slow progress toward recovery, lay motionless, staring at the side logs. On the floor beside him, rolled in a blanket, Kansas snored. Mucker sat happily beside the kitchen table rearranging his paper figures, unconscious of the long journey ahead of him, and of the operation which, Dr. Gaynor believed, would counteract the damaging effects that ill-treatment had had on the boy mentally. Rodrigo lay in front of the office heater, watching the flames through the cracks in the stove and smoking lazily. He was well fed and well cared for, therefore, content. The Scudders, with Dr. Gaynor and the stage driver, had considerably left the shack.

After finishing the letter he thought of the Book of Forgetfulness. It was near the time set for its

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return, and he decided he would enclose it with his letter. Tiptoeing into his room, he looked first on the shelf where it usually lay. It was not there. Finally, he found it on the table beneath some of Mr. Scudder's possessions, and, to his surprise, the last page was scrawled over in a large, running hand. Returning to the office, he examined the page. At the bottom were the signatures of the Scudders, Dr. Gaynor and Kansas Brown. Ross screwed up his forehead in perplexity, and began to read. At the head of the page stood the words, "To MR. ROSS GRANT, SENIOR." Following this address was a message which caused the reader to blush furiously in embarrassment at the same time he was grinning with delight, for the message read :

"If you are looking for a safe and profitable investment, yielding an interest which promises a steady increase with his advancing years and further education, permit us to recommend your son, Ross Grant, Jr., named out here in the Shoshones —DOC TENDERFOOT."

The Stories in this Series are :

ROSS GRANT, TENDERFOOT
ROSS GRANT, GOLD HUNTER
ROSS GRANT ON THE TRAIL
ROSS GRANT IN MINERS' CAMP

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